

A GIBBET AGAINST THE SKY

**A Collection of
129 Poems by Robert E. Howard**



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129 Poems by Robert E. Howard

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MUSINGS

The little poets sing of little things:
Hope, cheer, and faith, small queens and puppet kings;
Lovers who kissed and then were made as one,
And modest flowers waving in the sun.

The mighty poets write in blood and tears
And agony that, flame-like, bites and sears.
They reach their mad blind hands into the night,
To plumb abysses dead to human sight;
To drag from gulfs where lunacy lies curled,
Mad, monstrous nightmare shapes to blast the world.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert E. Howard was born in a small Texan town on January 22nd, 1906, as the only child of the traveling country physician Dr. Isaac Mordecai Howard, and his wife Hester Jane Ervin. During Howard's early years the family moved from one small Texas town to the next, relocating every year or two, until in 1919 they finally settled in the hamlet of Cross Plains, where Dr. Howard would be a well-respected general practitioner — here Howard would spend the rest of his life.

Howard started to write early — from childhood on, he had known that this was what he wanted to do — and he turned into an incredibly prolific author, covering a wide range of action and adventure genres. Howard wrote to earn a living, and since the magazines that bought his stories were paying poorly, he had to make up for this by volume. He was a careful writer, usually writing outlines and several drafts of his stories before he submitted them, but he wrote fast, rarely ran out of ideas (or of older stories to re-use and improve), and above all he was an unremitting worker: “*Writing is pounding out one damn yarn after another, pounding them out whether you want to or not ... the only way I can get anything done is to keep pounding away*” (as quoted by Novalyne Price Ellis, in her biography *One Who Walked Alone*).

Howard pounded away at historical fiction, fantasy, adventure, horror, boxing, western, detective and comedy stories, and also at several hundred poems — though these, he knew, would not be published by the magazines he was writing for.

All this time, Howard's life was troubled. From early age on he suffered from depression, and then he was burdened by the chronic illness of his mother. It was she who in his childhood had installed in him the love for literature and poetry, and he felt very close to her — when she became bed-ridden, it was he who became her caregiver for many years until her death. His unsteady commercial success as a writer did not mitigate the pain of his depression, and a longstanding on-and-off love affair with the only woman he had ever been closely acquainted with was leading nowhere. On June 11th, 1936, when he was told that his mother would not awake from the coma into which she had fallen, he felt released of his duty to her, walked out to his car, took a gun he had borrowed from the glove box, and shot himself.

Many of the more than 700 poems that Howard has written appear to be deeply personal. While they tell more about Howard himself than his prose fiction does, we must not jump to conclusions too quickly — not all first person narrators are meant to represent the author. In many poems they are very obviously his fictitious creations, but even where this seems less obvious, it may still be the case.

When Howard writes (in *Man am I*), “*I've known [...] the flames that tormented Oscar Wilde and tortured Paul Verlaine,*” is he writing about himself, about his own homosexuality? In the absence

of any information, we can only speculate. It is hard not to read *The Tempter* as an actual suicide note — still, if we do this, do we do his art justice?

Let us not get too distracted by questions which we cannot reasonably answer — we have Howard's poems to listen to, and they speak for themselves.

ABOUT THIS EDITION

This selection of Howard's poems, most of which were not published during the author's lifetime, reflects the editor's personal choices; it does not try to give a balanced picture of Howard's poetic oeuvre, nor of the poet's person. Not only the selection, which is arguably biased towards the dark, but also the order in which the poems are here presented, and their division in five sections, are based upon nothing but the editor's fancy.

No deliberate changes were made, but for lack of access to reliable source material typographical and formatting details do not necessarily conform to those of Howard's own manuscripts.

Where the title of a poem is identical to the poem's first line, this poem has originally been untitled.

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1.

AMBITION

Build me a gibbet against the sky,
Solid and strong and long miles high,
Let me hang where the high winds blow
That never stoop to the world below,
And the great clouds lumber by.
Let the people who toil below
See me swaying to and fro,
See me swinging the aeons through,
A dancing dot in the distant blue.



A STIRRING OF GREEN LEAVES

I long for the South as a man for a maid,
The rose at the window bar,
The stars and the palm-trees' velvet shade
And the strum of a Spanish guitar.

My people laughed at the frost and cold,
And the blast from winter's mouth,
But my soul is worn and thin and old
And it reaches blind to the South.

Why should I yearn for a gypsy trail
Through the olive trees of Spain?
Mine is the race of the Western Gael
And the cold, slow blood of the Dane.

But never the restless leaves are stirred
By a breath from summer's mouth
But like the soul of a wandering bird
My soul is yearning South.



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 languorous 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.



A CHALLENGE TO BAST

Come not to me, Bubastes,
With agate talons hid,
Veil not the fury of your eyes
Beneath the drooping lid.

Save all your gentleness for those
Mad passion makes aghast,
For they who are too frail to face
Your love's unholy blast.

But come to me as you of old
Your demon lovers met —
A black, stark naked frenzied thing
Of ebony and jet.

Where jackals haunt the shadows
In the star-light's yellow glow
With bodies writhing savagely,
And teeth that gnash in ecstasy,
We'll glut all hidden splendors
That maddened passions know.



EGYPT

Bubastes! Down the lank and sullen years
Your magic haunts my dreams in distant lands,
My old desire assails me with red brands;
I see the god that o'er your shoulder leers,
Your eyes, your eyes like mystic midnight meres —
Your body quivering to my questing hands —
Why do you beckon me across the sands?
Have you not other victims to your spears?

There is no dream, but your long narrow eyes
Bring back the days of Egypt's dusky skies.
Fair Bast! I come! I know you wait me there,
And I must feel again, like singing wine,
Your slender fingers flutter through my hair,
Your slim, white body nestling close to mine.



IVORY IN THE NIGHT

Maidens of star and of moon,
 born from the mists of the age,
I thrill to the touch of your hands,
 in the night when the shadows are o'er me.
Your eyes are like the gulfs of the night,
 your limbs are like ivory gleaming —
But your lips are more red than is mortal,
 and pointed the nails of your fingers.



DESIRE

“Turn out the light.” I raised a willing hand
And plunged the room into the silken, cool
Darkness in which the deeper passions rule;
Your tresses snared me with each moon-lit strand,
Your soft breasts sent warm raptures through my hand.
I felt your slim, fresh body close to mine,
The blood went racing through my veins like wine
And my desire was like a flaming brand.

The pulsing world was as a couch for us;
The brittle moon that flung her silver down
A jewel mystical and luminous
Enshrined and fashioned in our passion’s crown;
The dusky, deep sapphorean sky above
A star-ensplendored canopy for love.



SCARLET AND GOLD ARE THE STARS TONIGHT

Scarlet and gold are the stars tonight,
The river runs silver below the bridge —
But the hour shall come when the dawn grows white
Over the eastern ridge.

Your face is a dim white flower of night,
In your arms unheeded the hours fall —
But the dawn makes hearts grow strange and light,
And the far lands call.



LOVE

I have felt your lips on mine
Your hair has veiled my eyes
When my blood was wild as singing wine
And star-gold flecked the skies.

We have watched the moonlight dance
On the breast of the still lagoon
But now I am tired of your changeless glance
In the eye of the wrinkled moon.

What have you given me
To name as an ultimate bliss?
Am I more strong, more free?
What slavery is this?
For a single star on the dusky sea
I would barter your hottest kiss.



THE SEA GIRL

My love is the girl of the jade green gown
And strange, inscrutable eyes;
She is slower far to smile than to frown
And her laugh is the wrath of the skies.

Her footsteps fall where the wild winds flee,
Her kiss is the touch of Fate;
And her love, the love that she gives to me
Is crueler than her hate.

The beautiful women of human ken,
They ravish man's love away,
But my girl tramples the bones of men
And mingles their souls with spray.

Pensive and quiet and fraught with guile
She dreams when the gulls drift free,
But her strange lips bide white teeth and her smile
Is the song of the Lorelei.

Yet her wind-blown voice is an urge and a spur
That bids me follow her fast
Though I know that I, through my love of her,
Shall come to my death at last.

Shall lie in her arms mid the sea-deeps green
Where the dim, lost tides go down,
Yet I would not trade for a white-armed queen
My girl of the jade green gown.



OCEAN-THOUGHTS

The strong winds whisper o'er the sea,
Flinging the gray-gnarled ocean's spate;
The gray waves lash along the lea.

The lone gulls wings are high and free,
The great seal trumpets for his mate;
The high winds drum, the wild winds dree.

The gray shoals roar unceasingly,
Where combers march in kingly state,
The crest-crowned monarchs of the sea.

And now, along the lone, white lea,
The surges fade, the winds abate.
And the wide sea lies silently.

But far to islands, restlessly
Surges the tide, unreined and great,
Forever roaming and forever free.

And thus my soul, forever restlessly,
Longs for the outworld, vast, unultimate,
The vasty freedom of the swinging sea,
Forever roaming and forever free.



LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM

I saw the evil red light gleam
Above the brothel door;
I entered in as in a dream
And climbed the stair once more.

I caught the stench of hairy men
And sweat and smoke and beer,
And cutting through the smudgy din
Her empty laugh rose clear.

I stood within her littered room
That opened on the hall;
I saw the flasks of cheap perfume
And the pictures on the wall.

Her hat was tossed on a broken chair,
A coat lay on the floor;
Cheap cigarettes made sick the air
That seeped through the sagging door.

And all my dreams sank down to fade,
And yet the girl stood there,
That I had visioned a laughing maid
With a blossom in her hair.

The girl I dreamed she might have been
Fades before she that is —
But I'll forget as do all men
In passion's barren bliss.

For she runs with Life a parallel —
The dream and its rotten core —
For Life's a harlot out of hell
With a red light over her door.



THE MYTH

Sages have said, we leave our sex on earth
When take we our departure through the skies;
And that a soul is done with sensual mirth,
When from this worldly sphere the ego flies.

We soar with white, unpassioned wings, and placid feet
Lead ne'er o'er ways that we have trod before,
And up and down and o'er the Golden Street,
We twang our harps and chant forever more.

They say that Passion's kiss there none will know;
No eager-breasted girl, nor clean-limbed boy;
The sages sing a tedious land, I trow,
For when ye steal the sex, ye steal the joy.

For all of worldly life is versed in Sex,
All that is fair and foul, or fine or fell,
It may fling down, uplift or merely vex,
Yet 'tis the wine of gods and flame of Hell.

We polish Vice, we scoff it and we hide,
And yet it is the wine of Life, the spice,
I cannot see how human soul might bide,
Forever in a barren Paradise.

Nay, this bare myth doth mock the very Name
For He made Beauty, strong, and clean and lithe,
But eld, self-righteous sinners, failed in shame,
They hated Beauty, so they built the myth.



THE WEAKLING

I died in sin and forthwith went to Hell;
I made myself at home upon the coals
Where seas of flame break on the cinder shoals.
Till Satan came and said with angry yell,
“You there — divulge what route by which you fell.”
“I spent my youth among the flowing bowls,
Wasted my life with women of dark souls,
Died brothel-fighting — drunk on muscatel.”

Said he, “My friend, you’ve been directed wrong:
You’ve naught to recommend you for our feasts —
Like factory owners, brokers, elders, priests;
The air for you! This place is for the strong!”
Then as I pondered, minded to rebel,
He laughed and forthwith kicked me out of Hell.



MEN ARE TOYS ON A GODLING'S STRING

Men are toys on a godling's string;
All of the world is chaff.
Glory and honor, let them sing:
I am content to laugh.



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!



MOONLIGHT ON A SKULL

Golden goats on a hillside black,
Silken hose on a wharf-side trull,
Naked girl on a silver rack —
What are dreams in a shadowed skull?

I stood at a shrine and Chiron died,
A woman laughed from the bawdy roofs,
And he burned and lived and rose in his pride
And shattered the tiles with clanging hoofs.

I opened a volume dark and rare,
I lit a candle of mystic lore —
Bare feet throbbed on the outer stair
And the candle faltered to the floor.

Ships that sail on a windy sea,
Lovers that take the world to wife,
What doth the harlot hold for me
Who scarce have lifted the veil of life?



RECOMPENSE

I have not heard lutes beckon me,
nor the brazen bugles call,
But once in the dim of a haunted lea
I heard the silence fall.

I have not heard the regal drum,
nor seen the flags unfurled,
But I have watched the dragons come,
fire-eyed, across the world.

I have not seen the horsemen fall
before the hurtling host,
But I have paced a silent hall
where each step waked a ghost.

I have not kissed the tiger-feet
of a strange-eyed golden god,
But I have walked a city's street
where no man else had trod.

I have not raised the canopies
that shelter revelling kings,
But I have fled from crimson eyes
and black unearthly wings.
I have not knelt outside the door
to kiss a pallid queen,
But I have seen a ghostly shore
that no man else has seen.

I have not seen the standards sweep
from keep and castle wall,
But I have seen a woman leap
from a dragon's crimson stall,
And I have heard strange surges boom
that no man heard before,
And seen a strange black city loom
on a mystic night-black shore.

And I have felt the sudden blow
of a nameless wind's cold breath,

And watched the grisly pilgrims go
that walk the roads of Death,
And I have seen black valleys gape,
abysses in the gloom,
And I have fought the deathless Ape
that guards the Doors of Doom.

I have not seen the face of Pan,
nor mocked the Dryad's haste,
But I have trailed a dark-eyed Man
across a windy waste.

I have not died as men may die,
nor sinned as men have sinned,
But I have reached a misty sky
upon a granite wind.



SLUMBER

A silver scroll against a marble sky,
A brooding idol hewn of crimson stone,
A dying queen upon an ebon throne,
An iron bird that rends the clouds on high,
A golden lute whose echoes never die —
A thousand dreams that men have never known
Spread mighty wings and fold me when alone
Upon my couch in haunted sleep I lie.

Then rending mists, the spurring whisper comes
“Wake, dreamer, wake, your tryst with Life to keep!”
Yet, waking, still a throb of phantom drums
Comes hauntingly across the mystic deep;
Their echo still my thrilling soul chord thrums —
Which is the waking, then, and which the sleep?



AN OPEN WINDOW

Behind the veil what gulfs of time and space?
What blinking moving shapes to blast the sight?
I shrink before a vague colossal face
Born in the mad immensities of night.



SHADOW OF DREAMS

Stay not from me that veil of dreams that gives
Strange seas and skies and lands and curious fire,
Black dragons, crimson moons and white desire,
That through the silvery fabric sifts and sieves
Strange shadows, shades and all unmeasured things,
And in the sifting lends them shapes and wings
And makes them known in ways past common knowing —
Red lands, black seas and ivory rivers flowing.

How of the gold we gather in our hands?
It cheers, but shall escape us at the last,
And shall mean less, when this brief day is past,
Than that we gathered on the yellow sands,
The phantom ore we found in Wizard-lands.

Keep not from me my veil of curious dreams
Through which I see the giant things which drink
From mountain-castled rivers — on the brink
Black elephants that woo the froned streams,
And golden tom-toms pulsing through the dusk,
And yellow stars, black trees and red-eyed cats,
And bales of silk and amber jars of musk,
And opal shrines and tents and vampire bats.

Long highways climbing eastward to the moon,
And caravans of camels lade with spice,
And ancient sword hilts carved with scroll and rune,
And marble queens with eyes of crimson ice.

Uncharted shores where moons of scarlet spray
Break on a Viking's galley on the sand,
And curtains held by one slim silver band
That float from casements opening on a bay,
And monstrous iron castles, dragon-barred,
And purple cloaks with inlaid gems bestarred.

Long silver tasseled mantles, curious furs,
And camel bells and dawns and golden heat,

And tuneful rattle of the horseman's spurs
Along some sleeping desert city's street.

Time strides and all too soon shall I grow old
With still all earth to see, all life to live:
Then come to me, my silver veil, and sieve,
Seas of illusion beached with magic gold.



THE AGES STRIDE ON GOLDEN FEET

The ages stride on golden feet
The stars re-echo to the beat;
And o'er the peaks across the vales
the sea-winds seek the dawn;

The east is tinted like the rose,
A light breeze through the tree-tops blows
And through the dawn the red deer goes
to meet the timid fawn.
Through the forest on to the smiling dawn.



DESERT DAWN

Dim seas of sand swim slowly into sight
As if from out the silence swiftly born;
Faint foremost herald of the coming morn,
Red tentacles reach out into the night;
The shadows gray, then fade to rosy white.
The stars fade out, the greatest and the least;
Now a red rose is blooming in the east,
And from its widening petals comes the light.

While, fleecy clouds are fading from on high,
The sun-god flings afar his golden brands;
A breeze springs up and races 'mid the dunes,
A-whisper with old tales and mystic runes;
Now blue and gold ride rampant in the sky,
And now full day comes marching o'er the sands.



L'ENVOI

Twilight striding o'er the mountain,
Morn is whispering o'er the desert.
Mid the leaves the sea-breeze murmurs,
From the woodlands dryads beckon,
Come with me and learn the glory
Of the desert in the morning,
Of the ocean in the dawning.



THE CALL OF PAN

My heart is a silver drum tonight —
— And the moon is red in the East —
And he drums with a rattle eery and light,
The god with the hoofs of the beast.
Drums with a thunder gold and light,
And the silence breathes like a mist rose white,
Is it my heart that he drums tonight,
Or the moon in the dreaming East?

His call to the sons of men at dawn —
And they falter and halt and start —
Is the haunting wail of pipe soon gone;
Oh, they hear his pipes in the brooding dawn,
But he shouts to me and he leads me on
With the drum that is my heart.



EARTH-BORN

By rose and verdant valley
And silence I was born,
My brothers were the mountains,
The purple gods of morn.

My sisters were the whirlwinds
That broke the dreaming plains —
The earth is in my sinews,
The stars are in my veins!

For first upon the molten
White silver sands I lay,
And saw the ocean beckon
With eyes of burning spray.

And up along the mountain,
And down along the lea
I heard my brothers singing,
The river and the tree.

And through the ocean's thunder,
And through the forest's hush
I heard my sisters calling,
The sea-wind and the thrush.

And still all living voices
Leap forth amain and far,
The sunset and the shadow,
The eagle and the star.

From caverns of the ocean
To highest mountain tree
I hear all voices singing
Their kinship unto me.



THE DAY BREAKS OVER SIMLA

Near a million dawns have burst
Scarlet over Jakko's hill
Since our burning kisses first
Mingled in the twilight still,
In the magic, sapphire dusk
 when our passions drank their fill.

I remember how the moon
Floated over shadowed dells
And the mellow mystic tune
Of the tinkling temple bells —
Ere Siddhertha's people turned
 to the braying sea-conch shells.

Lips to scarlet lips we pressed
Ah, your eyes were star lit meres
As your tresses I caressed
Calmed your modest virgin fears —
Love upon an Indian night,
 love to last a thousand years.

Fades the rosy dawn as slow
Morning flames across the plain;
With a sigh I turn and go
Humming some old time refrain
To the consul house as day
 over Simla breaks again.



A MOMENT

Let me forget all men a space,
All dole and death and dearth;
Let me clutch the world in my hungry arms —
The paramour of the earth.

The hills are gowned in emerald trees
And the sea-green tides of grain,
And the joy, oh God, of the tingling sod,
Oh, it rends my heart in twain.

My feet are bare to the burning dew,
My breast to the stinging breeze;
And I watch the sun in the flaming blue
Like a worshipper on his knees.

With the joys of the sun and love and growth
All things of the earth are rife;
And the soul that is deep in the breast of me
Sings with the pulse of Life.



A RIDING SONG

Blast away the black veil,
Blast away the blue;
Fill with wind the slack sail,
Stars are blinking through.

Hammers pound, hammers pound,
Ghosts are in the hall;
Out beyond the dim sound
The green seas call.

What of hearts can men lend
Beg or buy or borrow?
Joy and hope and pain end
Riding down Tomorrow.

Shadows haunt the still house —
Lock the doors forever;
Fling the key in the sea,
Riding from the river.

Lock the Door behind the doors
On all joy and sorrow;
Drown them where the sea roars,
Riding down Tomorrow!



DEEPS

There is a cavern in the deep
Beyond the sea-winds brawl;
Where the hills of the sea slope high and steep,
And dragons sleep
And serpents creep
There is a cavern in the deep
Where strange sea-creatures crawl.



THE SEA-WOMAN

The wild sea is beating
Against the grey sands;
The woman, the sea-woman,
Stretches her hands.

Her eyes they are mystic
And cold as the sea,
With slender white fingers
She beckons to me —

There are woods in the sea
Though the leaves are all grey,
The ocean's pale roses
Lift dim in the spray.

I follow I follow —
The grey sea-gull flies —
Ah, woman, sea-woman,
There's death in your eyes.



BLACK SEAS

I have heard black seas booming in the night
On dim uncharted shores beneath the stars,
With reefs that never gleamed to mortal sight,
And winds that never hastened man-hewn spars.
I waver on the threshold of my choice —
Oh silver stars that gleam in oceans black! —
For through the night there sounds a nameless Voice:
“Who ride the dusky seas — they come not back.”



SURRENDER (THE ROAD TO REST)

I will rise some day when the day is done
And the stars begin to quiver;
I will follow the road of the setting sun
Till I come to a dreaming river.

I am weary now of the world and vow
Of the winds and the winter weather;
I'll reel through a few more years somehow,
Then I'll quit them altogether.

I'll go to a girl that once I knew
And I will not swerve or err,
And I care not if she be false or true
For I am not true to her.

Her eyes are fierce and her skin is brown
And her wild blood hotly races,
But it's little I care if she does not frown
At any man's embraces.

Should I ask for a love none may invade?
Is she more or less than human?
Do I ask for more, who have betrayed
Man, devil, god and woman?

Enough for me if she has for me
A bamboo hut she'll share,
And enough tequila to set me free
From the ghosts that leer and stare.

I'll lie all day in a sodden sleep
Through days without name or number,
With only the wind in the sky's blue deep
To haunt my unshaken slumber.

And I'll lie by night in the star-roofed hut
Forgetful and quiet-hearted,
Till she comes with her burning eyes half shut
And her red lips hot and parted.

The past is flown when the cup is full,
And there is no chain for linking
And any woman is beautiful
When a man is blind with drinking.

Life is a lie that cuts like a knife
With its sorrow and fading blisses;
I'll go to a girl who asks naught of life
Save wine and a drunkard's kisses.

No man shall know my race or name,
Or my past sun-ripe or rotten,
Till I travel the road by which I came,
Forgetting and soon forgotten.



A MAN

I tore a pine from the mountain crag
I plunged it into the sea
And I wrote my name across the stars
For all of Eternity.

I rocked the world with my chariots
I shook the seas with my pride
And at last I looked at my name in the stars
And I laid me down and died.

The morns gave birth to the surging years
Year rose on dying year
But ever above in the flaming stars
My name stood blazing clear.

And the people came and the people went
With their fetters and chains and bars,
Saying, "I wonder what unknown man
Those strange words wrote on the stars?"



THE GODS I WORSHIPPED

The standards toss in pride
As priests and prelates go,
But the gods I worshipped died
Eight thousand years ago.

The gods of the mountain side,
The gods of the buffalo,
The gods of the surging tide,
The ceaseless ebb and flow.



MONARCHS

These be the kings of men,
Lords of the Ultimate Night,
Kings of the desert and fen —
Jackal, vulture and kite.



2.

THE HEART OF THE SEA'S DESIRE

The stars beat up from the shadowy sea,
The caves of the coral and pearl,
And the night is afire with a red desire
For the loins of a golden girl.

You have left your girdle upon the beach,
And you wade from the pulsing land,
And the hot tide darts to your secret parts
That have known one lover's hand.

The hot tide laves your rounded limbs,
That his subtle fingers part,
And the sea that lies between your thighs
Is the heart of the Night's red heart.

In the days to come and the nights to come,
And the days and the nights to be,
A babe you shall hold to your breast of gold
As you croon a lullaby;

A babe with the cry of a wind-racked gull,
That shall grow to a round-limbed girl
With strange cold eyes like the sea that lies
In the caves of coral and pearl.

Her soul shall be as an ocean wind,
Restless her feet shall be,
And she shall be part of the Night's red heart,
And the heart of the sounding sea.

And the man who lies by your side at night,
He is not your daughter's sire;
For she is the babe of a hungry Night,
And the heart of the sea's desire!



FLAMING MARBLE

I carved a woman out of marble when
The walls of Athens echoed to my fame:
And in the myrtle crown was shrined my name.
I wrought with skill beyond all earthly ken;
And into cold, inhuman beauty then
I breathed a mist of white and living flame —
And from her pedestal she rose and came
To snare the souls and rend the hearts of men.

Without a soul, without a human heart
She broke the crystal gong of mortal pride.
And even I fell victim to my art:
With bitter, joyous love I claimed my bride.
And still with frozen hate that never dies
She sits and stares at me with icy eyes.



LESBIA

From whence came this grim desire?
What was the wine in my blood?
What raced through my veins like fire
And beat at my brain like a flood?

Bare is the desert's dust,
Deep is the emerald sea —
Barer my deathless lust,
Deeper the hunger of me.

Goddess I sit and brood —
They cringe to my Hell-lit eyes,
The wretched women nude
I have gripped between my thighs.

As they writhed between my hands
And the ocean heard their screams
Firing my passion's brands
As I dreamed my lurid dreams.

Their breath came fast and hot,
Their tresses were Hades' mesh;
World and the worlds were not;
Flesh against pulsing flesh.

Their white limbs fluttered and tossed,
They whimpered beneath my grasp
And their maidenhood was lost
In strange unnatural clasp.

Hours my pleasure beguiled
The green Arcadian glades,
As idle mornings I whiled
With free-hipped country maids.

Under the star-gemmed skies
That looked upon curious scenes
I have spread the round white thighs
Of naked and frightened queens.

What was it turned my face
From brown-limbed Grecian boys,
Weary of their embrace
To darker and barer joys?

A miser weary of coins
I wearied of early charms,
Of youths who ungirt my loins,
Restless sighed in their arms.

With many a youth I lay,
But their wine to me was dregs.
I found scant joy in they
Who parted my supple legs.

I turned to the loves I prize;
Found joy amid perfumed curls,
In a maiden's amorous sighs,
In the tears of naked girls.

These are the wine of delight —
A girl's ungirdled charms,
A woman's laugh in the night
As she lies in my eager arms.

Goddess I sit and laugh,
Nude as the scornful moon —
World and the worlds are chaff.
Say, shall my day be soon?



A ROMAN LADY

There is a strangeness in my soul
A dark and brooding sea.
Nor all the waves on Capri's shoal
Might stay the thirst of me.
For men have come and men have gone
For pleasure or for hire.
Though they lay broken at the dawn
They did not quench my fire.
My pity is a deathly ruth
I burn men with my eyes.
Oh, would all men were one strong youth
To break between my thighs.

And many a man his fortune spread
To glut my ecstasy
As I lay panting on his bed
In shameless nudity.
But all of ancient Egypt's gold
Can never equal this,
Nor all the treasures kingdoms hold,
A single hour of bliss.
Within my villa's high domain
Are boys from Britain's rocks
And dark eyed slender lads from Spain
And Greeks with perfumed locks
And youths of soft and subtle speech
From furtherest Orient,
Wherever arms of legions reach
And Roman chains are sent.

Why may I not be satiate
With kisses of some boy —
They only rouse my passion's spate
I never know such joy
As when through chambers filled with noise
Of wails and pleas and sighs
I stride among my naked boys
With whips that bruise their thighs.

I drift through mists red flaming flung
On hills of ecstacies
As shoulder-wealed and buttock-stung
They shriek and kiss my knees.



NUN

I have anchored my ship to a quiet port;
A land that is holy and blest.
But I gaze through my bars at the tempest's sport
And I long for the sea's unrest.



PRUDE

I dare not join my sisters in the street;
I think of people's talk, the cynic stare.
Fierce envy makes me scornful of their play,
And hide my lust behind a haughty air.



THE CHOIR GIRL

I have a saintly voice, the people say;
With Elder Blank I send the music winging —
I smile and compliment him on his singing —
By God, I'd rather hear a jackass bray.

I nod and smile to all the pious sisters —
I wish their rears were stung with seven blisters.
That youthful minister, so straight and slim —
I'd trade my soul for one long night with him.



GIRL

Gods, what a handsome youth across the way.
What shall I do to make him notice me?
I must not be too obvious — there
I'll shift my dress, demurely and let him see
A quick glance of an ankle very trim;
Then blush and smooth my skirts down hastily
As if 'twere unintentional — Hell!
The fool's not even got his eyes on me.



SAILOR

I saw a mermaid sporting in the bay,
Far down, far down where blew no roaring gale;
About her snowy shoulders flashed the spray,
The waves played emerald at her sinewy tail;
She swam a jade and golden, star-set way,
Where all the rainbow colors seemed to play —
She vanished at the Swedish captain's hail
Who bid me go to Hell and furl a sail.



NEVER BEYOND THE BEAST

Rise to the peak of the ladder
Where the ghosts of the planets feast —
Out of the reach of the adder —
Never beyond the Beast.
He is there, in the abyss brooding,
Where the nameless black fires fall;
He is there, in the stars intruding,
Where the sun is a silver ball.

Beyond all weeping or revel,
He lurks in the cloud and the sod;
He grips the doors of the Devil
And the hasp on the gates of God.
Build and endeavor and fashion —
Never can you escape
The blind black brutish passion —
The lust of the primal Ape.



A GREAT MAN SPEAKS

They set me up on high, a marble saint,
As if to guard the virtue of the park.
My flanks are gaunt, my gaze is cold and stark,
For I must look the part the liars paint,
They've cleansed my history of fleshy taint.
The elders bid the younger people mark
How virtuous I gleam against the dark —
Could I but speak I'd make the bastards faint.

Great God, how could they know the lusty zest,
The love of life that made my sinews dance? —
Below me now, against my base, inert,
A lousy tramp, a sleeping house-maid rest,
I yearn for that square flask in his old pants.
My fingers burn to feel beneath her skirt.



REBELLION

The marble statues tossed against the sky
In gestures blind as though to rend and kill,
Not one upon his pedestal was still.
Stiff fingers clutched at winds that whispered by,
And from the white lips rose a deathly cry:
“Cursed be the hands that broke us from the hill!
There slumber of unbirth was ours till
They gave us life that cannot live or die.”

And then as from a dream I stirred and woke —
Sublime and still each statue raised its head,
Etched pure and cold against the leafy green,
No limb was moved, no sigh the silence broke;
And people walked amid the grove and said:
“How peaceful these white gods! — aye, how serene.”



THE ROBES OF THE RIGHTEOUS

I am a saintly reformer,
 basking in goodly renown
Sure of applaud of the righteous,
 cinctured in purity's gown.
Young men and old men revere me,
 women and girls out of school
Come to me telling their secrets,
 seeking my counseling cool.
Little they know of my story
 when I was the water-front's toast,
Back in the days of my glory
 down on the Barbary Coast.
Young and my lips full and crimson,
 flaming with passionate blood,
My love was the leap of an ocean,
 my passion the swing of the flood.
Changing and varied my fancies
 yet no woman ever gave more
For I joyed in the man on my body
 just as much as the one just before.
Ah, nights that were lurid and gorgeous,
 under the bar lamps blaze
Flutter of cards on the table,
 faces that leered through the haze
Of smoke drifting up from the stogies,
 the red liquor flowing free
And the shout of the salty ballads
 that sailors sang from the sea.
The money scattered like water,
 the pagan thrill of the dance
The hand that groped in my clothing,
 the burning and meaning glance
Then the look as the stair I mounted,
 the man that left the floor,
The joyous and panting waiting,
 the stealthy knock at my door —

What if they knew, the elders,
that I was a Barbary whore?
Hiding my charms with meekness
under purity's gown
Sure of applaud of the righteous,
basking in goodly renown.



REPENTANCE

How is it that I am what I am
How did I come to fall?
Who was the man my soul to damn
Black in the sight of all?
Who was it came in my virginhood
And in some evil hour
Turned all my life to bad from good
Bruising the tender flower?
I cannot remember the fellow's name
I had long ago forgot;
I was young and my blood was flame
The person mattered not.
I was hot as a blazing brand
Blood and body and nerve
Ripe to be plucked by the first man's hand
And any man would serve.
I have had my day, I have had my fling
Men have bowed at my knee.
I sit in the bars where the harlots sing
To sailors hot from the sea.
Sallow my cheeks and my lips have faded
Life's roses slip my clutch
But my blood is still hot and still unjaded
I can thrill to the deck-hand's touch.
Still I thrill to the hands of men
I love the contact yet
The breath that is laden with wharfside gin
The scent of tobacco and sweat.
Bristly jowls on my painted cheek
The obscene, whispered jest,
Calloused hands that lustfully seek
My out-worn charms to quest.
My by-gone life is dim and far;
I am content with gin,
A slug of wine, sometimes at the bar,
A room for the sailormen.



THE OPEN WINDOW

I remember my sister Eve
And her supple form and her vivid eyes
And the heart that she wore upon her sleeve
And the tales that our mother swore were lies.

Her arms were cool to a younger child,
And wild and strange were the songs she sung,
But her hands went cold when our mother smiled
And she said that our mother was never young.

She went in a grey and wintry dawn
That stabbed the veil of the rainy night —
A flash in the door, and she was gone
As a white moth flits to the candle light.

Our mother? She spoke her name no more.
Gaunter she grew and grim and hard.
The beggar turned from our tight-lipped door
And the flowers shrank from our leafless yard.

I saw her, Eve, in the harlot's guise.
Her face was haggard, painted and drawn,
But the freedom, God, in her changeless eyes
Made white my soul like a forest dawn.



THE WITCH

We set a stake amid the stones
That crown the headland shore,
Where wild the sea-wind ever drones
And where the combers roar.

Then leg and ankle, wrist and hand,
We bound her to the stake
With chains that might the fire withstand,
And never a word she spake.

The grey gulls whirled by, light and fleet;
Loud called the hooded tern.
We fired the fagots at her feet
And left her there to burn.

Over her bare breasts flowed her hair,
About her leaped the flame;
But as we turned to leave her there
She spoke no word of blame.

I turned upon the sloping lea,
A moment paused, alone,
Half fearful, gazing, lest I see
The Devil claim his own.

About her breast the red fires gleamed,
The dark smoke caught her hair,
And to my wondering eyes it seemed
A halo floated there.

Fools! Fools! A human soul be cleaned
By fire of Satan's taint —
'Tis we are henchmen of the Fiend!
For we have burned — a Saint!



MOON MOCKERY

I walked in Tara's wood one summer night,
And saw, amid the still, star-haunted skies,
A slender moon in silver mist arise,
And hover on the hill as if in fright.
Burning, I seized her veil and held her tight:
An instant all her glow was in my eyes;
Then she was gone, swift as a white bird flies,
And I went down the hill in opal light.

And soon I was aware, as down I came,
That all was strange and new on every side;
Strange people went about me to and fro,
And when I spoke with trembling mine own name
They turned away, but one man said: "He died
In Tara Wood, a hundred years ago."



THE LAST WORDS HE HEARD

The chariots were chanting in the gloom,
The long dark banners carved the crimson sky,
A whisper reached me as a shaft went by,
A deadly bride that sought a deathly groom.
A black tide swept us, plume on waving plume.
The arrows filled the air like one great sigh
The shields boomed out in one great hollow cry,
Dim pallid faces fringed that sea of doom.

Then in an instant all the loud alarms
Died out in silence far along the plain,
For faces gleamed bare skulls unhelmeted,
The broken spears fell down from fleshless arms.
I cried, "My God, but all of these are slain!"
A Voice replied, "Nay, you alone are dead."



THE KIOWA'S TALE

All day I lay with the sun at my back
As a serpent lies with a changeless stare,
My fierce eyes fixed on the single track
That led from the woods to the cabin there.

All day, that long late summer day
Green leaves rustled above my head
And startled song birds flitting that way
Glimpsed the glint of my steel and fled.

Slow sank the sun and the woods were still —
Afar there whispered a streamlet's croon —
Long had I waited to make my kill
And the branches murmured, "Soon, ah, soon!"

He came at dusk, through the twilight red
With the loose long stride of his swinging hips
And I drew the shaft to its gleaming head,
And the scalp-yell hovered upon my lips.

Fair of mark in the fading day —
My fingers quivered upon the shaft,
My red soul leaped with the lust to slay,
My breath came swift — when a woman laughed.

From out the cabin she came to him,
Straight and slight as an eagle's feather.
I saw them kiss in the twilight dim
I heard them laugh — as they laughed together.

From the notch unheeded slipped the cord,
Breaking the arrow — it fell in half.
The moon came up like a golden lord;
As I stole away I heard them laugh.



A BUCCANEER SPEAKS

I've broken the laws of man and God,
I've flung my gauntlet forth to the world.
I've turned from the ways that in youth I trod —
Yonder the Skull Flag flies unfurled.

I laugh at Death and I mock at Life.
Through seas of blood I have steered my prow.
I've known the glories of crimson strife
And I've tattooed the cross-bones on my brow.

I've bared my breast to the sea-wind's force;
Sailed red ways beyond seamen's ken.
I've scattered red ruin along my course,
Of ravished women and slaughtered men.

I've steered in the teeth of bloody dawns
And I've raced the sun-set o'er crimson seas.
I've sailed where abyss-red Hell yawns,
And I've battled the bergs where the star beams freeze.

I've seized my wish at the hilt of the sword
And held my own by the point of the blade,
Spite of the foe or my own wild horde,
Were it gold of man or beauty of maid.

I've had my pleasure in slaughter and wreck,
And all undaunted my end shall be,
With the broken sword on a bloody deck
Or the raven's croak on the gallows tree.



A DYING PIRATE SPEAKS OF TREASURE

Lash me two round shot hard to my ankles;
Over the rail let me slide to the deep;
I'll never see Bristol; the crack of a pistol
Has weighted my eyelids wi' coming o' sleep.

The prize it was ours, its crew all a-lying
Face down in the scuppers and dead on the deck;
When *spat!* came the ball of the mate who lay dying,
Cheating the gallows, mayhap, o' my neck.

You'll take a new captain and share all the plunder
And sail for Tortuga or ever it's morn,
And maybe you'll drink for him that lies under
The tides that come creeping around from the Horn.

Give you a map o' the treasure I've taken?
Tell where the gems and the doubloons are hid?
Why, hiding of treasure's the custom and pleasure
Of Drake and of Morgan, of Flint and of Kidd.

Of the twenty-odd years I've sailed on the ocean,
On the Red Sea Trade with the Main's Brotherhood,
By all the winds shaken, great loot I ha' taken
And mainly considered it splendid and good.

So clap on all sails and steer for the sunset,
If ever my treasure you're wishful to find —
Where white combers thunder you'll find rarer plunder
Than out o' Golconda there ever was mined.

For I've hidden my loot in the winds and the surges,
Where the keel breaks the waves and soft surges croon,
It's the gems o' the skyline where sea and sky merges,
It's the gold o' the sun and the silk o' the moon.

It's the silver o' starlight, the mist o' the morning
All gossamer webs, and the deep coral caves,
The winds and the wonder o' reef-riven thunder,
The emerald sheen o' the snow-crested waves.

The gold that I gathered that mankind had minted,
It slipped through my fingers like sands on the beach;
But the silver o' starlight was ever unstinted,
And the gold o' the sunset was ever in reach.

Oh, the sea is my love, though my fingers be crimson,
The treasure I've hidden, you hunt for in vain;
So sail ye for plunder till Judgment Day's thunder —
But I'll go to my Treasure House under the Main.



THE SKULL IN THE CLOUDS (REUBEN'S BRETHREN)

"Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel."

Drain the cup while the ale is bright,
Brief truce to remorse and sorrow!
I drink the health of my friend tonight —
I may cut his throat tomorrow.

Tonight I fling a curse in the cup
For the foe whose lines we sundered —
I may ride in his ranks when the sun comes up
And die for the flag I plundered.

Kisses I drank in the blaze of noon,
At eve may be bitter as scorning —
And I go in the light of a mocking moon
To the woman I cursed this morning.

For deep in my soul the old gods brood —
And I come of a restless breed —
And my heart is blown in each drifting mood
As clouds blow over the mead.



THE SKULL IN THE CLOUDS (REUBEN'S BIRTHRIGHT)

The Black Prince scowled above his lance,
and wrath in his hot eyes lay,
“I would rather you rode with the spears of France
and not at my side today.
A man may parry an open blow,
but I know not where to fend;
I would that you were an open foe,
instead of a sworn friend.

“You came to me in an hour of need,
and your heart I thought I saw;
But you are one of a rebel breed
that knows not king or law.
You — with your ever smiling face
and a black heart under your mail —
With the haughty strain of the Norman race
and the wild, black blood of the Gael.

“Thrice in a night fight's close-locked gloom
my shield by merest chance
Has turned a sword that thrust like doom —
I wot 'twas not of France!
And in a dust-cloud, blind and red,
as we charged the Provence line
An unseen axe struck Fitzjames dead,
who gave his life for mine.

“Had I proofs, your head should fall this day
or ever I rode to strife.
Are you but a wolf to rend and slay,
with naught to guide your life?
No gleam of love in a lady's eyes,
no honor or faith or fame?”
I raised my face to the brooding skies
and laughed like a roaring flame.

“I followed the sign of the Geraldine
from Meath to the western sea

Till a careless word that I scarcely heard
bred hate in the heart of me.
Then I lent my sword to the Irish chiefs,
for half of my blood is Gael,
And we cut like a sickle through the sheafs
as we harried the lines of the Pale.

“But Dermot O’Connor, wild with wine,
called me a dog at heel,
And I cleft his bosom to the spine
and fled to the black O’Neil.
We harried the chieftains of the south;
we shattered the Norman bows.
We wasted the land from Cork to Louth;
we trampled our fallen foes.

“But Conn O’Neill put on me a slight
before the Gaelic lords,
And I betrayed him in the night
to the red O’Donnell swords.
I am no thrall to any man,
no vassal to any king.
I owe no vow to any clan,
nor faith to any thing.

“Traitor — but not for fear or gold,
but the fire in my own dark brain;
For the coins I loot from the broken hold
I throw to the winds again.
And I am true to myself alone,
through pride and the traitor’s part.
I would give my life to shield your throne,
or rip from your breast the heart.

“For a look or a word, scarce thought or heard,
I follow a fading fire.
Past bead and bell and the hangman’s cell,
like a harp-call of desire.
I may not see the road I ride
for the witch-fire lamps that gleam;

But phantoms glide at my bridle-side,
and I follow a nameless Dream.”

The Black Prince shuddered and shook his head,
then crossed himself again:
“Go, in God’s name, and never,” he said,
“ride in my sight again.”

The starlight silvered my bridle-rein;
the moonlight burned my lance
As I rode back from the wars again
through the pleasant hills of France,
As I rode to tell Lord Amory
of the dark Fitzgerald line
If the Black Prince dies, it needs must be
by another hand than mine.



THE RIDE OF FALUME

Falume of Spain rode forth amain
when twilight's crimson fell
To drink a toast with Bahram's ghost
in the scarlet land of Hell.
His rowels clashed as swift he dashed
along the flaming skies;
The sunset rode at his bridle braid
and the moon was in his eyes.
The waves were green with an eerie sheen
over the hills of Thule
And the ripples beat to his horse's feet
like a serpent in a pool.
On vampire wings the shadow things
wheeled round and round his head,
Till he came at last to a kingdom vast
in the Land of the Restless Dead.

They thronged about in a grisly rout,
they caught at his silver rein;
"Avaunt, foul host! Tell Bahram's ghost
Falume has come from Spain!"
Then flame-arrayed rose Bahram's shade:
"What would ye have, Falume?"
"Ho, Bahram who on earth I slew
where Tagus' waters boom,
Now though I shore your life of yore
amid the burning West,
I ride to Hell to bid ye tell
where I might ride to rest.
My beard is white and dim my sight
and I would fain be gone.
Speak without guile: where lies the isle
of mystic Avalon?"

"A league beyond the western wind,
a mile beyond the moon,
Where the dim seas roar on an unknown shore
and the drifting stars lie strewn;

The lotus buds there scent the woods
where the quiet rivers gleam,
And king and knight in the mystic light
the ages drowse and dream.”

With sudden bound Falume wheeled round,
he fled through the flying wrack
Till he came again to the land of Spain
with the sunset at his back.

“No dreams for me, but living free,
red wine and battle’s roar;
I breast the gales and I ride the trails
until I ride no more.”



THE RHYME OF THE THREE SLAVERS

Still and dim lay sea and land
As they rowed from the sullen shore,
Their captive lay, bound foot and hand;
His eyes gleamed as they swore:
“The men-of-war will come again
But you’ll come never more.

“The men-of-war will come and go
Proud ships of the English line,
But of our commerce they’ll not know
And none will tell the swine;
For you’ll be fathoms down below
The spray of the driving brine.

“And the word shall go afield and far
That thus our laws are made
And a feast for the sharks off Calabar
The price the traitor paid.
And this the fate of every man
That hinders the white man’s trade.”

Far on the still bay’s dusky blue
Rocked by the drowsy tide
Their daggers pierced him through and through
And they flung him overside.
His eyes were hells as he sank to death
And he cursed them as he died.

They weighed their anchor and sailed at dawn
With the souls for which they’d paid,
Three men, the vilest of Hell’s red spawn,
Fairly and Fall and Slade.
Basest of Satan’s Brotherhood,
Sharks of the slaver’s trade.

And little they recked of the man they slew—
Chief of a fetish clan —
For telling tales of their bloody crew
To the ships of the Englishman.

(But there be deeps of the black man's soul
No white man's eye may scan.)

They scattered far o'er the Seven Seas
To glut each blood-stained purse;
They did foul deeds on far blue leas —
All crimes of the Universe.
But ever there followed beneath the tides
The ghost of a black man's curse.

For Fall was slain by a Somo chief,
His skull was a bushman's plunder,
Fairly died on a Baltic reef
Where his schooner crashed asunder.
And Slade was drowned off a northern sound
And a black arm hauled him under.



MISER'S GOLD

“Nay, have no fear. The man was blind,” said she.
“How could he see ’twas we that took his gold?
The devil, man! I thought you were bold!”
“This is a chancy business!” muttered he,
“And we’ll be lucky if we get to sea.
The fellow deals with demons, I’ve been told.”
“Let’s open the chest, shut up and take a hold.”
Then silence as they knocked the hinges free.

A glint of silver and a sheen of jade —
Two strange gems gleaming from a silken fold —
Rare plunder — gods, was that a hidden blade?
A scream, a curse, two bodies stark and cold.
With jewel eyes above them crawled and swayed
The serpent left to watch the miser’s gold.



3.

ONE BLOOD STRAIN

Now autumn comes and summer goes,
And rises in my heart again,
As witchfire glimmers through a pool,
The mystic madness of the Dane.

Blue thunder of a foaming sea
Reverberating through my sleep,
White billowing sails that fill and flee
Across a wind-swept restless deep —

They speak to me with subtle tongue
Of blue-bright ways my forbears trod,
When time the bearded Vikings bent
Their oars against the winds of God.

And I am but a common man
Who treads a dreary way ashore,
But oceans thunder in my dreams,
And blue waves break on creaking beams,
And foaming water swirls and creams
About the strongly bending oar.

When summer goes and autumn comes
To paint the leaves with sombre fires,
I feel, like throbs of distant drums,
The urge of distant nameless sires.



TO THE CONTENTED

Bide by the fluted iron walls
Take ye a serving wench to wife;
Drown in the pot the bugle's calls,
Trade your spear for a peddler's knife.
Turn to the vendor's paltry strife,
Gird ye round with doors and bars
Safely snore in the lap of Life —
I must follow the restless stars.

Wait at the doors of your master's halls
— For the faithful server, boards are rife —
Make no oath when the whip-lash falls —
Hark to the counsel of your wife;
Trade your harp for a peddler's fife.
But gods, the spray and the plunging spars!
Here is my heart — in the heart of Life
And I must follow the restless stars.

Envoi

King, there are stallions in golden stalls,
But bars of sapphire are only bars!
Bide in peace in the high safe halls —
I must follow the restless stars.



RED THUNDER

Thunder in the black skies beating down the rain,
Thunder in the black cliffs, looming o'er the main,
Thunder on the black sea and thunder in my brain.

God's on the night wind, Satan's on his throne
By the red lake lurid and the great grim stone —
Still through the roofs of Hell the brooding thunders drone.

Trident for a rapier, Satan thrusts and foins
Crouching on his throne with his great goat loins —
Souls are his footstools and hearts are his coins.

Slave of all the ages, though lord of the air;
Solomon o'ercame him, set him roaring there,
Crouching on the coals where the great flames flare.

Thunder from the grim gulfs, out of cosmic deep
Where the red eyes glimmer and the black wings sweep,
Thunder down to Satan, wake him from his sleep!

Thunder on the shores of Hell, scattering the coal,
Riding down the mountain on the moon-mare's foal,
Blasting out the caves of the gnome and the troll.

Satan, brother Satan, rise and break your chain!
Solomon is dust and his spells grow vain —
Rise through the world in the thunder and the rain.

Rush upon the cities, roaring in your might,
Break down the towers in the moon's pale light,
Build a wall of corpses for God's great sight,
Quench the red thunder in my brain this night.



MAN AM I

Man am I, man, and less than a beast,
man, and more than a god;
For I have followed the flaming trails
that deities never trod;
And in my soul there are secret fire
and the curse of the leper's spot,
And passions smolder, such hidden lusts
as the lowest beasts know not.

Man am I, wolf of a wolfish world,
with a soul that I only sell
And a whirlwind maze of sin and lust
from the furnaces of Hell.
My Fate was forged on the anvils of Hell
and riveted 'bout my soul,
And the demons brought worn-out fags of Lives
to make a sardonic whole.

My soul is a spire of living flame,
my soul is a soaring fire
That gives no heed to Satan's mead
or Hades' ultimate ire;
For I've known Labor with no reward
and Toiling with never a gain,
And the flames that tormented Oscar Wilde
and tortured Paul Verlaine.

My soul is a spire of living fire,
a leaping flame divine;
But I live my days and I tread my ways
in the Deserts of the Swine.
My soul is a strange and far-winged bird,
out of the Mystic whirled,
But I must tread the wandering trails
of a mazy, sordid world.



SYMBOLS

Scarce had the east grown red with dawn
Or the moon-born day begun
Ere three of us went up a winding road
In the face of the rising sun.

One of us plucked a red rose
One of us plucked a white
One of us turned from the rising sun
And reached his hands to the night.



MATCH A TOAD WITH A FAR-WINGED HAWK

(To Tevis Clyde Smith)

Match a toad with a far-winged hawk,
A scarlet rose with a thistle stalk;
A stagnant pond with the white sea-tide —
You match the friendship of Bob and Clyde.

Clyde was a plucker of gems divine —
Bob was half poet, half devil-swine.
One of them mounted the gods' own peak,
Out of the world's vile muck and reek,
Up from the world-path's ruck and slime,
Climbed on a ladder of godlike rhyme. —
One of them made his bid for fame,
Scorched his wing at the Muses' flame,
Warped his soul like a brooding devil,
Found at last, and kept to, his level.
A friendship strange — yet it lasted on
Till their lives had faded to dusk from dawn.
Friendship of a falcon for a mugger —
Gods' own poet and third-rate slugger.
Lived their lives, friend unto friend —
Each in his own way met his end.

One of them passed like a Median king —
One of them died in a boxing ring.
One of them passed on a distant shore
Where the breakers answered the sea-wind's roar.
High on the crags he stood at bay,
Laughed like a god o'er the din of the fray;
Crimson the cliffs and red his sword,
One man facing a blood-crazed horde;
Man after man fell to his blade,
Laughed as he faced them, unafraid.
They swarmed like demons; what did he care?
Beauty and glory and pride were there;
Crag and mountain, ocean and sky,
Glorying to see a strong man die.

Laughed on the crags like a white-limbed god,
For he knew the ways that the godlings trod —
He had scaled all peaks of glory. Last
With a snatch of a song on his lips he passed.

One heard the tumult of throngs outbreak
As he writhed on the matt like a wounded snake,
Striving to get his legs beneath —
Red oaths ebbed through his broken teeth —
Above him the ring-light's garish blaze,
Sordid faces leered through the haze,
Foreign voices venting foul spleen,
Scents of unwashed forms obscene —
Shouts that flickered the ring-light's shine
“Stand up and fight, you yellow swine!”
Then the darkness loomed like a mighty tide
And he gasped out a crimson curse and died.

Thus they lived their lives friend unto friend,
And each in his own way met his end.
Match a toad with a far-winged hawk,
A crimson rose with a thistle stalk;
A stagnant pond with the ocean's tide —
You match the friendship of Bob and Clyde.
Friend unto friend, they lived their days,
Friend unto friend they walked their ways.



SWORDS GLIMMERED UP THE PASS

Swords glimmered up the pass
Fringing the grim dark mass.
There was blood on the grass;
Red blood
But the flood
Far below lumbered on to the east and the dawn —
When all men are gone
Shall not they,
Hill and stream,
As today
Gleam and dream,
Forgetting forever in majesty still
That men climbed the hill or died on the river.
High on the great black crags
Like hags
Brooding for death and slaughter,
We waited
With the thirst of our blades unsated
And below us rippled the water.
We two — you and I
Last to die.
At bay there we stood and the wind in our hair
Shook the iron clawed brood of the black eagle's lair.
They came in the flame of the thundering dawn
Driven and drawn
By the spate of their hate and the fate of their lust
For the glimmering dust
They dreamed they could hold, the traitor of gold,
The breaker of trust.
And we laughed in the bend of a curse that our blades
They were virgin of rust
Then from his bed
The great sun clambered red;
His gleams lit up the lances and the banners of the foe;
The cohorts clambered sealing our doom beyond repealing;
Behind our boulders kneeling we hurled our lead below.

Many a bastard there
Of that dark band
Clutched with a nerveless hand
The mocking air.
Man after man, one by one
Dropped in the eye of the sun
To the crack of the ball;
Reeled from the sombre cliff
Grim and stiff,
And the river below drank his fall.
Two men — and we laughed and we swore
In the fringe of the rifle smoke's plume,
Two men — and we laughed at the roar
Of a whole army bringing our doom.
And our rifles stammered and yammered,
Carving the air with red laces
Till our powder was burning their faces
As up to our muzzles they clambered.
You rose,
And you jeered —
In the beard
Of our foes
You hurled gold.
And some of them clutched it with screams,
And some in the clutching grew cold.
And you roared to the horde:
“Here's the price of Hell's thunder!”
And the leap of your sword
Rent a bosom a-sunder.
I swung up the stock
Of my empty gun
And the crash and the shock
Broke the brains out of one.
Then smoke veiled the sun
And blood, cliff and rock.
A reeking red carpet we made and we laid
With the crash of my gun and the slash of your blade.
Bullets jerked at us,

Knives stung;
Sword points dirked at us,
Gun stocks swung. Like reddened leopards we sprung.
And they forced us back to the lip of the pass
That over the river hung.
We were blackened with powder,
Red with blood
Ever louder we heard the flood.
Your blade was a shard on a battered hilt,
Your grip slipped on the blood you'd spilt.
From my rifle the splintered stock was rent
And the barrel was twisted, burst and bent.
The last charge came — fierce faces rose
To go blank under our last great blows.
Flame in our faces waved its sheet
And we felt the gulf yawn under our feet ...
Roaring our final oaths we fell
And crashed together into Hell.



TARANTELLA

Heads! Heads! Heads!
Bounce on the cobble stones.
Glitter of scarlets and flame of reds
Crimson the road that Freedom treads,
We're rearing a fane of bones.
And bare feet
Weave their beat
Down the red reeking street.
Hell holds sway.
Slay! Slay!
Hate goes bellowing through the land,
Crimson-hued is my gleaming brand.
Kill! Kill! And my lips a-thrill
With hot kisses snatched in the frenzied whirl —
Raped from the lips of a noble girl.
And her brother's blood on my hand.
Rage, lust, passion-hot.
Prance, dance, you sans-culotte.
This is your hour, the height of your power,
Culture, decency forgot.
Blood! Blood! The red gleams preen
On yon fair maid the guillotine!
Vive, vive la guillotine!
Hate and slaughter, that is all;
Blood to shed and heads to fall.
Love is lust and good is lies,
Satan rides the eery skies.
Dance and sway
Whirl away
Meet and kiss, it is bliss
But to slay!
All the world's a gore-rimmed sea, lo, the devil laughs with glee.
Come and dance then, you with me, come and caper wild and free.
With red blood those fires are lit,
Hades' smoke is tinged with it.
And the very skies that soar

Are encrimsoned as with gore —
Yon was once a baron's head,
Now it decks a pike instead.
I salute ye, with my sword.
Here's to you, m'sieu le lord.
Much you had of wondrous wine,
Ermine coats and horses fine,
Luscious lips of dainty girls,
Snowy bosoms, gold and pearls,
None so haughty as your sneer —
Now you ride a common's spear.
Here's to you! In hell you burn.
I am on the upward turn
Of the slow revolving Wheel
With my reign of blood and steel.
O'er my prostrate head ye strode;
On my shoulder bent ye rode.
You the whip-man, I the clown
Till I rose to tread you down.
They will rise to trample me —
For the moment I am free.
Through the ribs the winds may drone
Now the world is all mine own.
Mine to lust, to rage, to dance!
Vive la Freedom! Vive la France!



THE ADVENTURER'S MISTRESS

The scarlet standards of the sun
Are marching up the mountain pass;
The whispers of the dawn winds run
Across the oxen-booming seas —
And shimmering in the waving grass
Are webs the ghostly spiders spun
When strange shapes glided in the trees
And shadows dusked the silent leas.

My castle stands upon a shore
Where waves are placid as a lake.
My galleons bring their golden store
As drowsy days drift idle by;
No gales make spar or top mast shake.
Here seas on shoals forever roar
And here the trees loom weird and high
And gaunt crags lift in the sky.

Why should I leave my towering walls
To tread the path about the earth?
Fair girls are dancing in those halls,
Their breasts are round, their arms are white,
And light and luring is their mirth,
And yet, for lust that ever calls
I tread the trails of eerie light
A phantom, through the phantom night.

For this, my lust is stronger far
Than demon's charm or witches' spell.
It heeds not wall nor dungeon bar
Nor anything that hindereth.
For it was born for One from Hell;
And she rides her Yellow Star
She fires my love with Hades' breath —
My ancient mistress, beldame Death.

She beckons me from every hill,
I see her standing by the sea;

I follow fast, I follow still
By horse and foot, by keel and sail
With all the winds that drone or dree.
I match her cunning with my skill
As fierce, alert, I keep the trail
Through desert sands and ocean gale.

My flaming beard is streaked with snow,
My arm is slower than of eld,
That once wreaked havoc on the foe;
And slower, too, these steel-clad hands
That in days gone by have felled
A lord of Mecca with one blow —
What time I wooed with clashing brands
From sunset to the Holy Lands.

The combers crash along the shale;
The seas are crimson with the dawn.
A ship with scarlet-spreading sail
Swings into view with lurch and list.
Somewhere the red abysses yawn
And though the slain years have their tale
Of broken swords and spears that missed,
Somewhere we have a secret tryst.

Soon I shall leap from shore to deck
And ride into the sky-line's haze
To follow my old lover's beck.
Aye, swift will fade the hill, the tree;
And moons will wane and suns will blaze
And stars will leap, nor shall I reckon —
For she waits on some distant lea
And at the last will come to me ...



THE DAY THAT I DIE

The day that I die shall the sky be clear
And the east sea-wind blow free,
Sweeping along with its rover's song
To bear my soul to sea.

They will carry me out of the bamboo hut
To the driftwood piled on the lea,
And ye that name me in after years,
This shall ye say of me:

That I followed the road of the restless gull
As free as a vagrant breeze,
That I bared my breast to the winds' unrest
And the wrath of the driving seas.

That I loved the song of the thrumming spars
And the lift of the plunging prow,
But I could not bide in the seaport towns
And I could not follow the plow.

For ever the wind came out of the east
To beckon me on and on,
The sunset's lure was my paramour
And I loved each rose-pale dawn.

That I lived to a straight and simple creed
The whole of my worldly span,
White or black or yellow I dealt
Foursquare with my fellow man.

That I drained life's cup to its blood-red lees
And it thrilled my every vein,
I did not frown when I laid it down
To lift it never again.

That ever my spirit turned my steps
To the naked morning lands,
And I came to rest on an unknown isle —
Jade cliffs and silver sands.

And I breathed my last with a simple tribe,
A people savage and free,
And they gave my body unto the fire
And my soul to the reinless sea.



THE DRUM

I heard the drum as I went down the street,
Its thunder above the people's din.
I shivered in the cold; my clothes were thin —
The drum — my brain reeled dizzy to its beat,
Lending a rag-time to my freezing feet,
Soaked with the rain my torn shoes let in.
“Enlist for home and country!” crazed for gin,
I heard the grim drum challenge and repeat.

Here in the bloody frozen mud I lie,
My brains are oozing out to stain the mire —
I never knew a woman or a home —
I heard the drum — it set my brain on fire —
I don't accuse — I guess I had to come —
But I am dying here — I'm wondering why.



LIFE

They bruised my soul with a proverb,
They bruised my back with a rod,
And they bade me bow to my elders,
For that was the word of God.

They pent up my soul and bound me
Till life was a living death,
They struck the wine from my fingers,
The passion from my breath.

I reached my hands to living,
They hurled me back into school,
And they said, "Go learn your lessons,
You innocent young fool."

They yowled till they woke the trumpets —
And the sword blade rent the plow,
And they said, "It is your duty
To die for your elders now."

They cowered far from the battle
As I went to the strife,
And I spilled my guts in the trenches
In the red dawn of my life.

And the elders named me hero,
But more than their words and ire
Was the scent of a strange wild flower
There where I died in the mire.



NIGHTS TO BOTH OF US KNOWN

The nights we walked among the stars
When dusky trees were still
And saw the slender crescent moon
Stretch naked on the hill.
The days when youth was golden fire
And dreams in dreams were won
And visions came on flaming wings
From night and setting sun,
Of oceans greater than our seas,
Long leagues of emerald green,
That broke on shadow haunted shores
In jade and crystal sheen.
And lands that lie along the sky
When twilight breaks the day,
Blue hills that hold enchanted lakes,
Ah, God, how far away.
And purple galleons aflame
With gems and frozen gold,
Red islands haunted by the ghosts
Of mariners of old.
And shadows gliding o'er the deep
With mystic echoed song —
Ah, God, the years, the crawling years,
How slow and lean and long,
Ah, days that swept on eagle wings,
Oh, nights to which we sung;
Oh years, long faded into night,
That worlds and we were young.



FORBIDDEN MAGIC

There came to me a man one summer night,
When all the world lay silent in the stars,
And moonlight crossed my room with ghostly bars.
He whispered hints of weird, unhallowed sight;
I followed — then in waves of spectral light
Mounted the shimmery ladders of my soul
Where moon-pale spiders, huge as dragons, stole —
Great forms like moths, with wings of wispy white.

Around the world the sighing of the loon
Shook misty lakes beneath the false-dawn's gleams;
Rose tinted shone the sky-line's minaret;
I rose in fear, and then with blood and sweat
Beat out the iron fabrics of my dreams,
And shaped of them a web to snare the moon.



A SONNET OF GOOD CHEER

Fling wide the portals, rose-lipped dawn has come
To kiss our drowsy visions into life;
Let me arise, a-lust for love and strife
To follow far some distant, pulsing drum.
Upon my vibrant soul-chords passions strum;
With hot, red, leaping blood my veins are rife.
Gods, let me take the universe to wife!
Ere Death, the cold accountant, close my sum.

Then as I spake, methought fierce laughter came
Across the dying hills where sunrise shot;
“Fool, fool, you came unbidden to this game,
And Death that takes you hence shall ask you not.
From life, this and only this, may you claim;
Living, to die, and dying, be forgot.”



HOPE EMPTY OF MEANING

Man is a fool and a blinded toy —
The Fire still flickers and burns,
Though the cobra coils in the cup called Joy,
And ever the Worm returns.

Life is a lamp with the glimmer gone,
A dank and a darkened cave;
Yet still I swear by the light of dawn,
And not by the grip of the grave.



TO A FRIEND

I toiled beside you in the galley's chains
Through long, long days of deathly toll the same.
North born, from some far Viking land you came;
The dark Milesian fury coursed my veins.
Then came a night of battle, blood and flame,
And we rose up and shook our tangled manes
And wiped out days and nights of fear and shame
With a rage that laved the decks in gore and brains.

The years have stretched to eons — vanished quite
That day we burst the grim forecastle door.
Yet let them have a care who mock our might —
The hour may come as in those days before
When we shall rise and bellow to the night
And plunge our hands in hot red blood once more.



SHADOWS

A black moon nailed against a sullen dawn
Shakes down dark petals of a sombre rose;
The long lank shadows, sons of solitude,
Slink to the hills that silent, crouch and brood.
Across the East a grisly radiance grows,
And in the West the last grim star is gone.
Sons of the glaring idols of the night,
There still are groves amid the ebon crags,
In silent valleys, far from human sight,
Where horror slinks and doom, and sunlight lags.
There still are caves which know no mortal foot
And crawling rivers, blind and ghastly still,
And rocks that grip the oak tree's twining root —
The asphodel still blooms beneath the hill.

I know your faces leering through the dark,
Your mumbling lips that fail of human speech.
The winds of night enfold you, swift and stark,
Unhallowed phantoms, whispering each to each.
You thrill with horror subtle, nameless, blind —
But grimmer shadows haunt the human mind.



SECRETS

There is a serpent lifts his crest o' nights
And hisses in the darkness of my room.
His substance and the cloaking night are one,
His form is of the soft, thick, musky dark.
His strange eyes glimmer and his scales are loud
Yet none but I can hear — and scarcely I.
His gliding whispers shake my sluggish soul
With strange wild fires and lights of other dreams.
He loops himself about me in the dark;
I struggle with a strange, wild ecstasy
And seek, yet would not wish, to free my limbs.
Strange shudders shake my limbs at his cold touch
As coil on coil he laps my naked form.
Colder than ice he is, yet in my soul
He kindles fires more hot than Hades' breath.
With soft insidious whisper at my cheek
He lures me to the midnight's curious joys.
I rise and follow. All the land is still.
The crescent moon hangs breathless in the sky,
Whose crystal deeps are pierced with pointed stars.
Through woodlands silver black he leads me on.
Over the terraced swards where fountains dance,
Until the moon lights up a window sill.
My naked feet no hint of sound may make.
We glide together o'er the silver sill.
I hear the velvet hangings swish behind
Like whisper of some crimson nightmare's wings.
My feet sink deep in rugs of silken weave
And like a ghost I bend above the bed,
A girl lies there, her sleeping lips a-smile
On soft arm pillowing the golden head.
Her tender limbs stretched out in light repose.
There is no gown to veil her symmetry.
She lies and shimmers ivory in the moon.
Those perfect, scarlet lips were made to kiss;
My arm should be about that slender waist.

But here the serpent rustles grisly scales,
And sways beside me like a fearful tree.
His whispers speak of deeper, fiercer lusts,
Of wilder joys, most terrible and strange
That change soft dreams to nightmares red and grim.
He indicates the curves of that soft breast;
He whispers of the red wine which is blood.
He makes me feel the thrill that's born of death.
This is not earthly — from what darkened world,
What shadowed planet, what inhuman sphere
Come such wild dreams, such fearsome fantasies?
The serpent bids me stoop to that soft breast
To let the dagger kiss — with one swift thrust —
Death should be beautiful, then crouching by
Watch with quick breath and glinting eye the blood
Drain slowly from that soft, rose-tinted cheek
Until the wine has oozed from every vein
Leaving her marble white and marble cold
Like some inhuman goddess from a star,
Drained clean of all the grosser things of life.
Then raise her gently from the ruby lake
And kiss her cheeks as one who knows true sin.



MEMORIES

I rose in the path of a hurtling dawn,
and I heard the ocean say:
“When the heart is tugging to be gone,
it’s best to be away.”
I gripped the mane of a granite wind,
and the stars rushed red beneath,
For the dew lay wet where the sun had set
ere I came to a wasted heath.

The brown grass grew like a witch’s nails,
the bats wheeled stark and lone;
But shattered columns staggered there
like a withered waste of stone.
The grass-grown pavements broke in dust
beneath my wayward feet.
The night wind whipped a vagrant dust
down what had been a street.

Upon a wall’s low wavering line
a cobra raised his hood.
Beside the ruins of a shrine
I saw a white owl brood;
And in my brain the mists gave way,
and the years came back to me,
And my laughter broke the silence grey,
as a serpent breaks the sea.

Here in old times a city rose
with human loves and hates,
And men came over the desert sands
to beat at the brazen gates.
The towers broke their spears and mauls
as a red cliff breaks the sea;
Ten thousand men beat at these walls —
but they fell because of me.

I was the thorn that stings the flesh;
the worm that gnaws the root;

A snaky net that might enmesh
a nation's iron foot.
I was the thief that slipped the bolt,
that broke the secret bars.
The red tide thundered through the wall,
and the flames put out the stars.

Dim Time has blotted out that night
of death and scarlet rain.
Victor and vanquished long are dust,
but the traitor lives again.
I mock the jests that the eons brought
in stone and the pale starlight,
And I laugh in the ruin that I wrought
like a jackal in a night.



AGAINST THE BLOOD RED MOON A TOWER STANDS

Against the blood red moon a tower stands;
An everlasting silence haunts the place.
It was not reared by any human hands,
The silent symbol of a shadowy race.
There, long ago, I stole through ancient night
My footsteps woke strange echoes through the hour;
Strange specters walked with me through mazy light.
I left my soul, a ghost to haunt the tower.



REMEMBRANCE

Eight thousand years ago a man I slew;
I lay in wait beside a sparkling rill
There in an upland valley green and still.
The white stream gurgled where the rushes grew;
The hills were veiled in dreamy hazes blue.
He came along the trail; with savage skill
My spear leaped like a snake to make my kill —
Leaped like a striking snake and pierced him through.

And still when blue haze dreams along the sky
And breezes bring the murmur of the sea,
A whisper thrills me where at ease I lie
Beneath the branches of some mountain tree;
He comes, fog-dim, the ghost that will not die,
And with accusing finger points at me.



ONE WHO COMES AT EVENTIDE

I think when I am old a furtive shape
Will sit beside me at my fireless hearth,
Dabbled with blood from stumps of severed wrists,
And flaked with blackened bits of mouldy earth.

My blood ran fire when the deed was done;
Now it runs colder than the moon that shone
On shattered fields where dead men lay in heaps
Who could not hear a ravished daughter's moan.

(Dim through the bloody dawn on bitter winds
The throbbing of the distant guns was brought
When I reeled like a drunkard from the hut
That hid the horror my red hands had wrought.)

So now I fire my veins with stinging wine,
And hoard my youth as misers hug their gold,
Because I know what shape will come and sit
Beside my crumbling hearth — when I am old.



SHADOWS FROM YESTERDAY

Ages ago in the dawn of Time,
I looked on a man with hate;
He fled my wrath but I followed his path,
as grim as the hand of Fate.
Crafty he was as a jungle snake,
but he could not 'scape from me;
I followed his trail through the fog-dim vale
and down by the restless sea.

To the desert brown I trailed him down,
from the mountain's craggy height.
And I speared him dead when the dawn was red
and left him for the kite.
Down through the years strange phantom fears
haunted my restless soul,
Strange whisperings like the far off sweep
of the sea upon a shoal.

For the dim ghost came when the sun had set
and shadows dusked the lea;
I heard the tread of the vengeful dead
and his eyes would gaze upon me.
And grim they blazed when the stars were hazed
by the fogs of the silent night,
And dim they gazed when the dawning raised,
in the silver lifting light.

About my sleep he would glide and creep
weaving a magic fell;
When I would dream he would stalk and seem
like a spectre straight from Hell.
And down the years he has haunted me,
mocking my reddened hand,
With spectral fears he has taunted me,
in every life and land.

Untold eons have passed away —
for the feet of Time are fleet —

And I met the man that I slew that day,
in a crowded city street.
A shifting glimpse of a pallid face,
with eyes that looked me through—
And I felt the spate of my primal hate
leap up in my veins anew.

And he knew me as I knew him,
for his face went strange and white,
And he swiftly whirled through the throng that swirled
and vanished from my sight.
Aye, he fled from me as in years gone by,
though the reason he might not know,
He vanished away in the crowd ere I
could speak to my ancient foe.

He fled ere I could tell my tale,
from a memory grim and dim,
But we will meet for the years are fleet
and I will atone to him.
For this a Truth as old as Hell,
changeless as cosmic rhyme,
For every sin that we revel in
we must make right some time.



THE SANDS OF TIME

Slow sift the sands of Time; the yellowed leaves
Go drifting down an old and bitter wind;
Across the frozen moors the hedges stand
In tattered garments that the frosts have thinned.

A thousand phantoms pluck my ragged sleeve,
Wan ghosts of souls long into darkness thrust.
Their pale lips tell lost dreams I thought mine own,
And old sick longings smite my heart to dust.

I may not even dream of jeweled dawns,
Nor sing with lips that have forgot to laugh.
I fling aside the cloak of Youth and limp
A withered man upon a broken staff.



ON WITH THE PLAY

Up with the curtain, lo, the stage is set;
The mimes come trooping for their destin'd parts,
The Devil swings his hand, the music starts;
But the main star has not arrived as yet,
And all the players wait and swear and fret.
He comes! The tamborine with empty clack
Greets the proud brow, the eye, the unbent back;
On with the play of broken dreams and sweat!

Aye, play their game if you would wish to rise,
Conform yourself to standard rote and rule,
But when you've reached the pinnacle of pelf
Some day take down an old book from the shelf,
And scanning pages, years, with curious eyes,
Remember one who signed himself — A Fool.



REBEL SOULS FROM THE FALLING DARK

Rebel souls from the falling dark,
What are the crowns you gain?
The quenching night of a dungeon stark
And the brine of the rusty chain.
The taunt and the tang of the bitter blood,
And the grim of the grisly bars,
The friar's chant and the hangman's hood —
And a star amid the stars!



4.

ROMANCE

I am king of all the Ages
I am ruler of the stars
I am master of Time's pages
And I mock at chain and bars.
Now, as when I sailed the world
Ere the galley's sails were furled
And the barnacles had crusted on their spars.

I am strife, I am Life,
I am mistress, I am wife!
I am wilder than the sea wind,
I am fiercer than the fire!
I am tale and song and fable,
I am Akkad, I am Babel,
I am Calno, I am Carthage, I am Tyre!

For I walked the streets of Gaza when the world was wild and young,
And I reveled in Carchemish when the golden minstrels sung;
All the world-road was my path, as I sang the songs of Gath
Or trod the streets of Nineveh where harlots roses flung.

I swam the wide Euphrates where it wanders through the plain
And I saw the dawn come flaming over Tyre.
I walked the roads of Ammon when the hills were veiled in rain,
And I watched the stars anon from the walls of Askalon
And I rose the plains of Palestine beneath the dawning's fire
When the leaves upon the trees danced and fluttered in the breeze
And a slim girl of Juda went singing to a lyre.



EMPIRE'S DESTINY

Bab-ilu's women gazed upon our spears,
And roses flung, and sang to see us ride.
We built a glory for the marching years
And starred our throne with silver nails of pride.
Our horses' hoofs were shod with brazen fears:
We laved our hands in blood and iron tears,
And laughed to hear how shackled kings had died.

Our chariots awoke the sleeping world;
The thunder of our hoofs the mountains broke;
Before our spears were empires' banners furled
And death and doom and iron winds were hurled,
And slaughter rode before, and clouds and smoke —
Then in the desert lands the tribes awoke
And death and vengeance 'round our walls were whirled.

Oh Babylon, lost Babylon! Where now
The opal altar and the golden spire,
The tower and the legend and the lyre?
Oh, withered fruit upon a broken bough!
The sobbing desert winds still whisper how
The sapphire city of the gods' desire
Fell in the smoke and crumbled in the fire;
And lizards bask upon her columns now.

Now poets sing her golden glory gone;
And Babylon has faded with the dawn.



A SONG OUT OF MIDIAN

These will I give you, Astair:
 an armlet of frozen gold,
Gods cut from the living rock,
 and carven gems in an amber crock,
And a purple woven Tyrian smock,
 and wine from a pirate's hold.

Kings shall kneel at your feet, Astair,
 emperors kiss your hand;
Captive girls for your joy shall dance,
 slim and straight as a striking lance,
Who tremble and bow at your mildest glance
 and kneel at your least command.

Galleys shall break the crimson seas
 seeking delights for you;
With silks and silvery fountain gleams
 I will weave a world that glows and seems
A shimmering mist of rainbow dreams,
 scarlet and white and blue.

Or is it glory you wish, Astair,
 the crash and the battle-flame?
The winds shall break on the warship's sail
 and Death ride free at my horse's tail,
Till all the tribes of the earth shall wail
 at the terror of your name.

I will break the thrones of the world, Astair,
 and fling them at your feet;
Flame and banners and doom shall fly,
 and my iron chariots rend the sky,
Whirlwind on whirlwind heaping high,
 death and a deadly sleet.

Why are you sad and still, Astair,
 counting my words as naught?
From slave to queen I have raised you high,
 and yet you stare with a weary eye,

And never the laugh has followed the sigh,
since you from your land were brought.

Do you long for the lowing herds, Astair?
For the desert's dawning white?
For the hawk-eyed tribesman's coarse hard fare,
and the brown firm limbs that are hard and bare,
And the eagle's rocks and the lion's lair,
and the tents of the Israelite?

I have never chained your limbs, Astair;
free as the winds that whirl
Go if you wish. The doors are wide,
since less to you is an empire's pride
Than the open lands where the tribesmen ride,
wooing the desert girl.



FOR WHAT IS A MAID TO THE SHOUT OF KINGS

For what is a maid to the shout of kings?
To the gilt parade and the host that sings?
Honor and gold and glorious raids
To he that is bold — and other maids.
Dawn gems gleam and white stars dim
By the quiet stream she watches him
Ride with the flash of shields and brands
To the battle's clash and the far strange lands.

Beyond the skyline where great kings ride,
Glory, jewels, honor and pride.
For the sap in the North must rise again
With the wild geese winging thither;
Gay hours die and a hawk must fly
And the rose of Spring must wither.



HARVEST

We reap and bind the bitter yield
Of seed we never sowed,
To buy the meat that others eat,
To pay the debts by others sealed —
Theirs was the fatness of the field,
Ours the barren road.



DREAMS OF NINEVEH

Silver bridge in a broken sky,
Golden fruit on a withered bough,
Red-lipped slaves that the ancients buy —
What are the dreams of Nineveh now?

Ghostly hoofs in the brooding night
Beat the bowl of the velvet stars.
Shadows of spears when the moon is white
Cross the sands with ebony bars.

But not the shadows that brood her fall
May check the sweep of the desert fire,
Nor a dead man lift up a crumbling wall,
Nor a spectre steady a falling spire.

Death fires rise in the desert sky
Where the armies of Sargon reeled;
And though her people still sell and buy,
Nineveh's doom is set and sealed.

Silver mast with a silken sail,
Sapphire seas 'neath a purple prow,
Hawk-eyed tribes on the desert trail —
What are the dreams of Nineveh now?



BABEL

Now in the gloom the pulsing drums repeat,
And all the night is filled with evil sound;
I hear the throbbing of inhuman feet
On marble stairs that silence locks around.

I see black temples loom against the night,
With tentacles like serpents writhed afar,
And waving in a dusky dragon light
Great moths whose wings unholy tapers char.
Red memory on memory, tier on tier,
Builds up a tower, time and space to span;
Through world on world I rise, and sphere on sphere,
To star-shot gulfs of lunacy and fear —
Black screaming ages never dreamed by man.

Was this your plan, foul spawn of cosmic mire,
To freeze my soul to stone and icy fire,
To carve me in the moon that all mankind
May know its race is futile, weak and blind —
A horror-blasted statue in the sky,
That does not live and nevermore can die?



THE PATH OF THE STRANGE WANDERERS

They have broken the lamps and burst the camps
And they follow the roads that the wild wind tramps;
And the starlight falls on Babel's halls
And the trumpeter mounts the broken walls
And the moon comes up through the mists and damp.

“They are here today,” the wild winds say,
“But who can trace the track of tomorrow?
And who can shackle a roving heart
That leans to the winds that waver and start,
Or chain a soul like the ocean spray,
Whiter than glory and brine as sorrow?”

“They are here today,” the fierce winds say,
“But the east is white and the sea is grey,
And the trumpet's blast is an empty blast
For the winds flee and they follow fast.
And the hall may fall and the city wall,
And the brazen trumpet forever call,
But the bladed rovers, where are they?”

Tower and hall and marble wall
Altar and honor and glory fall;
Grass grows in the city street —
Where are the rovers' restless feet?
Other cities waver and rise
And grow and loom before their eyes;
Topaz towers in dreaming skies.
And cities are dust upon the plain
But the wanderers come not back again.



CRETE

The green waves wash above us
Who slumber in the bay
As washed the tide of ages
That swept our race away.

Our cities — dusty ruins;
Our galleys — deep sea slime;
Our very ghosts, forgotten,
Bow to the sweep of Time.

Our land lies stark before it
As we to alien spears,
But, ah, the love we bore it
Outlasts the crawling years.

Ah, jeweled spires at even —
The lute's soft golden sigh —
The Lion-Gates of Knossos
When dawn was in the sky.



EASTER ISLAND

How many weary centuries have flown
Since strange-eyed beings walked this ancient shore,
Hearing, as we, the green Pacific's roar,
Hewing fantastic gods from sullen stone!
The sands are bare; the idols stand alone.
Impotent 'gainst the years was all their lore:
They are forgot in ages dim and hoar;
Yet still, as then, the long tide-surges drone.

What dreams had they that shaped these uncouth things?
Before these gods what victims bled and died?
What purple galleys swept along the strand
That bore the tribute of what dim sea-kings?
But now, they reign o'er a forgotten land,
Gazing forever out beyond the tide.



THE ISLE OF HY-BRASIL

There's a far, lone island in the dim, red West
Where the sea-waves are crimson with the red of burnished gold,
(Sapphire in the billows, gold upon the crest)
An island that is older than the continents are old.

For when in dim Atlantis a thousand jeweled spires
Burned through the twilight in the ocean's dusky smile,
And when mystic Lemuria glowed with myriad gemming fires
Strange ships went sailing to seek the wondrous isle.

And when the land of Britain was a forest for the deer
And the mammoth roamed the mountains and the plains were veiled in snow,
When the dawn had swept the ocean and the air was crystal clear
The ape-man looking sea-ward caught the distant topaz glow.

When Drake went down to Darien and Cortez sailed the Main
And the wide blue Pacific lay like a summer dream,
From the gold-decked bridges of the galleons of Spain
Far upon the skyline they saw the island gleam.

It flashes in the Baltic, dimly glimpsed through driving snow,
And it lights the Indian Ocean when the waves are lying still,
It dreams along the sea-rim in the twilight's golden glow,
And mariners have named it The Isle of Hy-Brasil.

For sailing ships are anchored close about that ancient isle,
Ships that roamed the oceans in the dim dawn days,
Coracles from Britain, triremes from the Nile,
Anchored round the harbors, mile on countless mile,
Ships and ships and shades of ships, fading in the haze.

And there's a Roman galley with its seven banks of oars,
And there's a golden barge-boat that knew the Caesar's hand,
And there's a sombre pirate craft with shattered cabin doors,
And there's a sturdy bireme that sailed to the Holy Land.
Main masts lifting like a forest of the south,
Beaked prows looming and the scarlet courses furled,
Dim decks heel-marked, warped by rain and drouth,
Rift in the cross-trees, drift of the southern seas;
Dim ships, strong ships, from all about the world.

High ships, proud ships, towering at their poops,
Galleons flaunting their pinnacles of pride,
Battleships and merchantmen and long, lean sloops,
Flagships floating with the schooners on the tide.

And there's a Viking Serpent that sailed the northern seas,
That knew the stride of giants, ferocious gods of brawn,
And there's a lateened rover that billowed to the breeze,
There a ship that sailed from Tyre when the waves were tinged with fire
And the first skies of history were rosyng to dawn.

The Good St. Brandon knew it when he turned him to the West
When he left the world behind him as he ventured far away,
And his fearless keel went plowing the ocean's sapphire crest
Till he won unto Hy-Brasil which no other mortal may.
For the island is Hy-Brasil, the paradise of ships,
Where the dim ghost crafts lie anchored and at rest,
Where the sea wind never rages and the sea rain never drips,
There they dream away the days in the mystic, sapphire haze
About the isle of Hy-Brasil, far off amid the West.



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 gleem and gloat —
The gods of the jungle drums.

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.



NOCTURNE

Night falls
On ruined walls
And towers hoary,
A star gleams
On vanished dreams—
Forgotten glory.

Dim shades
Haunt the glades
For trystery.
The pale night
Glitters white
With mystery.

Breezes shake
The silver lake
Waves quiver.
Shadows leap
Sway and sleep
Along the river.



THE MOUNTAINS OF CALIFORNIA

Grass and the rains and snow,
Trumpet and tribal drum;
Across my crests the people go
Over my peaks the people come.
Girt with the pelts of lion and hare,
Plodding with oxen wains,
Climbing the steeps on a Spanish mare,
Soaring in aeroplanes.
Men with their hates and their ires,
Men with their loves and their lust;
Still shall I reign when their spires
And their castles tumble to dust.



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 traveler, mazed with silence, thinks to look on hieroglyphs,
Thinks to see a carven Pharaoh on his throne.

Once these sullen hills were beaches and they saw them 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.



TWILIGHT ON STONEHENGE

Great columns loom against the brooding sky
Like giants of another world they stand
Flinging their shadows far across the land —
Across the sunset's path their shadows lie;
Above, between, the lone, gray sea-gulls fly.
And now the moon rides like a smoldering brand
And mid those shadows, hewn by Titan's hand
Glides shades of eld, ghost shapes, dim-seen and sly.

The crimson moon rides higher o'er the brake,
The darkness fades, the shadows merge and melt;
Across the fen the sea-wind's whisper comes
Bearing the discord of forgotten drums —
That speak to ghosts alone where bird and snake
Drowse in the last, lone stronghold of the Celt.



A SONG OF THE LEGIONS

The crystal gong of the silence
Shivers in shattered shards;
And the marble hall re-echoes
To the tread of the crested guards.

Fingers pluck at the hangings,
White in the purple gloam;
Midnight lies with the sleepers
In the pulsing heart of Rome.

Rosy lips smile in slumber
Arms nestle bodies white —
Rome in her silks and marbles
Sleeps through the soft-lipped night.

Echoing down the heather
The restless trumpets call,
Questioning each of the other
Down the line of the winding Wall.

Eyes strain hard in the darkness,
To the pulse of an echo blown —
Rome is of gold and iron
But a soldier is flesh and bone.

Fires in the hills are burning,
To the far off throb of a drum;
Through the ghostly waving heather
What phantom figures come?

Shadows or painted warriors?
The death drums never cease.
Stand to your watches, legion,
That Rome may sleep in peace.

Beacons burn in the towers,
Eyes straining hard beside,
Ears a-tune to the murmur,
The sigh of each changing tide.

Was that the shrill of a night bird
Where the waves are grey as steel,
Or the grind of a muffled oar-lock,
The wash of a prowling keel?

Driftwood or sword-fanged sea-wolves,
Not yours is rest or ease;
Stand to your watches, legion,
That Rome may sleep in peace.



SHADOWS ON THE ROAD

Nial of Ulster, welcome home!
What saw you on the road to Rome? —
Legions thronging the fertile plains?
Shouting hordes of the country folks
With the harvest heaped in their groaning wains?
Shepherd piping under the oak?
Laurel chaplet and purple cloak?
Smokes of the feasting coiled on high?
Meadows and fields of the rich, ripe green
Lazing under a cobalt sky?
Brown little villages sleeping between?
What saw you on the road to Rome?
“Crimson tracks in the blackened loam,
Skeleton trees and a blasted plain,
A heap of skulls and a child insane,
Ruin and wreck and the reek of pain
On the wrack of the road to Rome.”

Nial, what saw you in Rome? —
Purple emperors riding there,
Down aisles with walls like marble foam,
To the golden trumpet's mystic flare?
Dark-eyed women who bind their hair,
As they bind men's hearts, with a silver comb?
Spires that cleave through the crystal air,
Arch and altar and amaranth stair?
Nial, what saw you in Rome?
“Broken shrines in the sobbing gloam,
Bare feet spurning the marble flags,
Towers fallen and walls dugged up,
A woman in chains and filthy rags.
Goths in the Forum howled to sup,
With an emperor's skull for a drinking-cup.
The black arch clave to the broken dome.
The Coliseum invites the bat.
The Vandal sits where the Caesars sat;
And the shadows are black on Rome.”

Nial, Nial, now you are home,
Why do you mutter and lonely roam?
“My brain is sick and I know no rest;
My heart is stone in my frozen breast,
For the feathers fall from the eagle’s crest
And the bright sea breaks in foam —
Kings and kingdoms and empires fall,
And the mist-black ruin covers them all,
And the honey of life is a bitter gall
Since I traveled the road to Rome.”



THE CELLS OF THE COLISEUM

Across the walls a shadow falls;
The dreary night drags on and on.
The horses stamp within their stalls.
I'll ride no more to meet the dawn.

Beyond this wall a sleeping Gaul
Mutters and tosses in his sleep.
Before him maybe I shall fall
Or in his heart my blade drink deep.

A silence falls along the halls;
The lions mutter in the gloom.
How Time along the hours crawls
Like some great sluggish worm of doom.

My heartbeats fall, a striking maul.
Because my thews are hard and strong
Within the hour I must fall
To meet the blood lust of the throng.

Along the halls a trumpet calls.
The red arena glimmers nigh.
Thor, let me mock these fools of Rome
And show them how a Goth can die.



THE GOLD AND THE GREY

Shadows and echoes haunt my dreams
with dim and subtle pain,
With the faded fire of a lost desire,
like a ghost on a moonlit plain,
In the pallid mist of death-like sleep
she comes again to me:
I see the gleam of her golden hair
and her eyes like the deep grey sea.

We came from the North as the spume is blown
when the blue tide billows down,
The kings of the South were overthrown
in ruin of camp and town,
Temple and shrine we dashed to dust,
and roared in the dead gods' ears;
We saw the fall of the kings of Gaul
and shattered the Belgae spears.

And South we rolled like a drifting cloud,
like a wind that bends the grass,
But we smote in vain on the gates of Spain
for our own kin held the Pass.
Then again we turned where the watch-fires burned
to mark the lines of Rome,
And fire and tower and standard sank
as ships that die in foam.

The legions came, hard hawk-eyed men,
war-wise in march and fray,
But we rushed like a whirlwind on their ranks
and swept their lines away.
Army and consul we overthrew,
staining the trampled loam;
Horror and fear like a lifted spear
lay hard on the walls of Rome.

Our mad desire was a flying fire
that should burn the Roman gate —

But our day of doom lay hard on us,
at a toss of the dice of Fate.

There rose a man in the ranks of Rome —
ill fall the cursed day!

Our German allies bit the dust
and we turned hard at bay.

Over the land like a ghostly hand
the mists of morning lay,

We smote their horsemen in the mist
and hacked a bloody way.

We smote their horsemen in a cloud
and as the mists were cleared

Right through the legion massed behind
our headlong squadron sheared.

Saddle to saddle we chained our ranks
for nothing of war we knew

But to charge in the old wild Celtic way —
and die, or slash right through.

We left red ruin in our wake,
dead men in ghastly ranks

When fresh, unwearied Roman arms
smote hard upon our flanks.

Baffled and weary, red with wounds,
leaguered on every side,

Chained to our doom we smote in vain,
slaughtered and sank and died.

Writhing among the horses' hoofs,
torn and slashed and gored,

Gripping still with a bloody hand
a notched and broken sword,

I heard the war-cry growing faint,
drowned by the trumpet's call,

And the roar of "Marius! Marius!"
triumphant over all.

Through the bloody dust and the swirling fog
as I strove in vain to rise,

I saw the last of the warriors fall
and swift as a falcon flies.

The Romans rush to the barricade
where the women watched the fight —
I heard the screams and I saw steel flash
and naked arms toss white.

The ravisher died as he gripped his prey,
by the dagger swiftly driven —
By the next stroke, with her own hand,
the heart of the girl was riven.

Brown fingers gripped white wrists in vain —
blood flecked the weary loam —
The Cimbri yield no virgin-slaves
to glut the lords of Rome!
And I saw as I crawled like a crippled snake
to slay before I died,
Unruly golden hair that tossed
in high barbaric pride.

Her slim foot pressed a dead man's breast,
her proud head back was thrown,
Matching the steel she held on high,
her eyes in glory shone.
I saw the gleam of her golden hair
and her eyes like the deep gray sea —
And the love in the gaze that sought me out,
barbaric, fierce and free —
Then the dagger fell and the skies fell too
and the mists closed over me.

Like phantoms into the ages lost
has the Cimbrian nation passed;
Destiny shifts like summer clouds
on Grecian hilltops massed.
Untold centuries glide away,
Marius long is dust;
Even eternal Rome has passed
in days of decay and rust.

But memories live in the ghosts of dreams
and dreams still come to me,
And I see the gleam of her golden hair
and her eyes like the deep grey sea.



THE GLADIATOR AND THE LADY

When I was a boy in Britain and you were a girl in Rome,
Forests and mountains lay between, and the hungry, restless foam.
Today naught lay between us, only the wall, at least,
That guards the proud patrician from the slave and the dying beast.
Our hearts we read that instant my eyes with your eyes met,
But there were swords to sunder and life blood to be let.
And you will marry a consul and live on the Palatine
And I will take some slave girl from the Garonne or the Rhine.

But you will dream at the banquet, while the roses scent the air
Of a blazing eyed barbarian with a shock of yellow hair.
And through the roar of the lions and the clang of sword and mace,
I'll dream of a pair of dark deep eyes and a proud patrician face.
We still are as far asunder as the hut and the arch and dome
When I was boy in Britain and you were a girl in Rome.



SKULLS AND DUST

The Persian slaughtered the Apis Bull;
 (Ammon-Ra is a darksome king.)
And the brain fermented beneath his skull.
 (Egypt's curse is a deathly thing.)

He rode on the desert raider's track;
 (Ammon-Ra is a darksome king.)
No man of his gleaming hosts came back.
And the dust winds drifted sombre and black.
 (Egypt's curse is a deathly thing.)

The eons passed on the desert land;
 (Ammon-Ra is a darksome king.)
And a stranger trod the shifting sand.
 (Egypt's curse is a deathly thing.)

His idle hand disturbed the dead;
 (Ammon-Ra is a darksome king.)
Till he found Cambysses' skull of dread
Whence the frenzied brain so long had fled,
That once held terrible visions red.
 (Egypt's curse is a deathly thing.)

And an asp crawled from the dust inside
 (Ammon-Ra is a darksome king.)
And the stranger fell and gibbered and died.
 (Egypt's curse is a deathly thing.)



THE GHOST KINGS

The ghost kings are marching;
 the midnight knows their tread,
From the distant, stealthy planets
 of the dim, unstable dead;
There are whisperings on the night-winds
 and the shuddering stars have fled.
A ghostly trumpet echoes
 from a barren mountainhead;
Through the fen the wandering witch-lights
 gleam like phantom arrows sped;
There is silence in the valleys
 and the moon is rising red.
The ghost kings are marching
 down the ages' dusty maze;
The unseen feet are tramping
 through the moonlight's pallid haze,
Down the hollow clanging stairways
 of a million yesterdays.
The ghost kings are marching,
 where the vague moon-vapor creeps,
While the night-wind to their coming,
 like a thund'rous herald sweeps;
They are clad in ancient grandeur,
 but the world, unheeding, sleeps.



5.

VISIONS

I cannot believe in a paradise
Glorious, undefiled,
For gates all scrolled and streets of gold
Are tales for a dreaming child.

I am too lost for shame
That it moves me unto mirth,
But I can vision a Hell of flame
For I have lived on Earth.



THE SPIDERS OF WEARINESS COME ON ME

The spiders of weariness come on me
To weave wide webs on my brain.
I must go to the night and the sighing sea
And the drive of the drifting rain.



FUTILITY

Time races on and none can stay the tread; bridal bowers
Re-echo to the flight of bats. Their garland'd towers
Rear like gaunt spectres 'gainst the dawning's red,
Veiled by the fogs of time the Slayer glowers.
Blithe Pan has passed and all the dryads fled.

We walk a dim defined and mystic vale,
The mountains vaguely loom on either hand,
Groping we go and often lose the trail,
Compassed by demon shapes of Shadowland.
On either hand we hear the breakers roar,
The shifting grey fogs close behind, before.

Mazed by the trail, and by the whole world plan,
Drudging and toiling, never knowing why,
The Cosmic Jester of the gods is man,
Philosophers are fools, priests jest and lie.
Nothing is real. Leaves fade and song-birds fly.

Bewildered still, our plodding ways we go,
The vagrant sport of all the winds that blow.
And after all this toilsome fume and fret —
What ocean lies beyond? I only know
This Universal stage is set.

The trail is placed and run that we must follow,
The Destin'd trail. 'Tis none of ours to choose,
The trail that only runs from night to night
From out the grey dawn's cynic and mocking light
Into the smoldering sun-set's crimson wallow.
I only know that though we win, we lose.
I only know that all conflict must cease,
That always after war, comes, somehow, peace.



THE BRIDE OF CUCHULAIN

Love, we have laughed at living,
Love, we have laughed at death;
At ecstasy and giving,
 and all vain things of breath.

We know, for we rent the curtain
To gaze behind the lure,
That naught but death is certain,
 that naught but death is pure.

From our thrones of ivory, flattered
The scarlet courtiers come;
Challenging ages hoary,
 pulses the regal drum.

But the breeze of the night is dreary
And the moon is bent and old
And your head on my breast is weary,
 and my soul is thin and cold.

Come to the upland meadows,
Come to the ocean grey,
We and the world are shadows
 swiftly drifting away.

There, where the grey sea crashes
Along the ancient shore,
There where the spent spray lashes
 white sands forevermore,

I will weave the pale sea flowers
To twine on your pallid brow
That you may forget lost hours
 and Time be only Now.

Then all Earth's joys and sorrows
Shall pass like ocean spray
Till all the sad tomorrows
 fade in one dim Today.



ROMANY ROAD

Some day I'll go down a Romany Road
But, oh, I'll go alone
Where the wind blows and the thistle grows
And the grey moss grips the stone.
Past the grey woods where the bat broods
Above a rain beat bone
Its a red road and a dead road
But a road that is all my own.
Some day I'll go down a Romany Road
With neither lover nor friend
For my road is a high road
And it runs to the River's bend.
And I'll go as the winds blow
As ever I have ken'd
With Death's hand on my stirrup band
And Hell await at the end.



AGE (TO THE OLD MEN)

Age sat on his high throne
And scoffed to see me ride,
But I was on the beaches
And racing with the tide.

Age sat on his golden throne
And named me as a fool,
But I was splashing maidens
Nude in a forest pool.

Age sat in his corner
And mocked my furious zest,
But I was breaking sun spears
On my hairy chest.

Age stole from his neighbor
Great stores of gems and gold.
Age called me from my games
To fight for his treasure hold.

Age cowered in his castle
And preached great deeds and high,
But I was laughing, laughing,
As I went forth to die.



THE VOICES WAKEN MEMORY

The blind black shadows reach inhuman arms
To draw me into darkness once again;
The brooding night-wind hints of nameless harms,
And down the shadowed hill a vague refrain
Bears half-remembered ghosts to haunt my soul,
Like far-off neighing of a nightmare's foal.

But let me fix my phantom-shadowed eyes
Hard on the stars — pale points of silver light —
Here is the borderland — here reason lies —
There, vision, gryphons — Nothing, and the Night.
Down, down, red spectres! Down, and rack me not!
Out, wolves of Hell! Oh God, my pulses thrum —
The night grows fierce and blind and red and hot,
And nearer still the grim insistent drum.

I will not look into the shadows — No!
The stars shall grip and hold my frantic gaze —
But even in the stars black visions grow,
And dragons writhe with iron eyes ablaze.
Oh Gods that raised my blindness with your curse,
And let me see the horrid shapes behind
All outward veils that cloak the universe,
The loathsome demon-spells that blind and bind,
Since even the stars are noisome, foul and fell,
Let me glut deep with memory dreams of Hell.



LINES WRITTEN IN THE REALIZATION THAT I MUST DIE

The Black Door gapes and the Black Wall rises;
Twilight gasps in the grip of Night.
Paper and dust are the gems man prizes —
Torches toss in my waning sight.

Drums of glory are lost in the ages,
Bare feet fail on a broken trail —
Let my name fade from the printed pages;
Dreams and visions are growing pale.

Twilight gathers and none can save me.
Well and well, for I would not stay:
Let me speak through the stone you gave me:
He never could say what he wished to say.

Why should I shrink from the sign of leaving?
My brain is wrapped in a darkened cloud;
Now in the Night are the Sisters weaving
For me a shroud.

Towers shake and the stars reel under,
Skulls are heaped in the Devil's fane;
My feet are wrapped in a rolling thunder,
Jets of agony lance my brain.

What of the world that I leave forever?
Phantom forms in a fading sight —
Carry me out on the ebon river
Into the Night.



MINGLE MY DUST WITH THE BURNING BRAND

Mingle my dust with the burning brand,
Scatter it free to the sky,
Fling it wide on the ocean's sand,
From peaks where the vultures fly.

Let it drift with the drifting tide,
And flit o'er the arctic floe,
Let it spin and ride where the snow-storms hide
And the wild ice-field winds blow.

Let it mingle with desert sand,
And the waves of a tropic sea,
When the roaring surge sweeps o'er the strand
And the ocean winds shout free.



AN OUTWORN STORY

There come long days when the soul turns sick,
And the heart is hollow and thin and old,
And the high-heaped clouds, grey fold on fold,
Lie like a grey shroud clammy and thick,
And a wind blows out of them deathly cold.

Only the ghost of a dead desire
Haunts bare woods and the muddied springs.
Grass grows rank in the courts of kings,
And the bats brood on the broken spire
Where the lizard crawls and the lichen clings.

Then men's thoughts turn to the soothing dust,
Where in the end all passions drown.
And stark winds blow and men lie down
To quiet ambition and hate and lust
In the clinging coverlets, bitter and brown.

The dim days come when in men's breast
The heart is shriveled and dark and cold.
The grey clouds cling like a shroud unrolled
And men, to the brown and bitter mold,
Turn to silence and utter rest
From an outworn story madly told.



TIDES

I am weary of birth and battle,
Seasons and Time and tide,
Of the ocean's empty rattle.
And the woman at my side.

I am weary of pain and revel,
And eyes that glitter or weep;
I will sell my soul to the Devil
For a thousand years of sleep.

Then never a dream shall haunt me,
And never a star shall rise,
Nor a shadow come to daunt me
In the blackness over my eyes.

There shall be no name or number
Of the seasons over me;
I shall know the tides of slumber
As a sunken ship the sea.

And when I shall wake hereafter,
And the Devil comes for his gain,
I will crush him with crimson laughter
And turn to my sleep again.



SURRENDER

Open the window and let me go,
I have tarried over long;
I hear the tides on the sands below
But there is no joy in the song.

My heart is hollow with endless pain,
My temples are growing white;
Open the window against the rain
And let me go to the night.

Once I hailed the Tomorrow,
I lifted a glad refrain,
But my heart is thin with sorrow
And my eyes are blind with pain.

My wine has been the salt of tears,
My bread is hard and stale;
Close the door on the bitter years
And let me go to the gale.

Oh, wind, sea wind on the bitter lea,
That harries the ships with fright,
Toss me and rend me and set me free,
Mingle my soul with the night.



THE CHANT DEMONIAK

I am Satan; I am weary,
For my road is long and hard
And it lies through regions dreary
Since the Golden Gates were barred.
(I wait, I wait at the Flaming Gate
I give men death and they give me hate.)

I am Satan, never resting
For the scourge is at my back.
Yonder soul, his crimes attesting,
To the fire, to the rack.
Yet another and another
Will the tally never cease?
Turn from sin, I beg, my brother,
Give a weary demon peace.
I am Satan, I am weary,
By the ever flaming sea;
Ye who tread my regions dreary,
Sinners, sinners, pity me.



THE DANCE WITH DEATH

The fogs of night
Fling banners red
To cloak the fading sun,
And I haste to the height
Of the mountain-head
O'er sombre valleys silently spread
Where murmur the ghosts of forgotten dead,
Through the star-gleam's glance
As I go to dance
With my mistress, the Hooded One.

Now, as the night-winds drone their dree
From the hidden caves of the ghostly sea,
And as the trees below wave dim in the vale,
And shadows flit through the star-light pale,
Weird night tunes peal
As we weave and reel
Like a maiden leal
And her cavalier.
But a grisly maid
Is the flitting shade
That sways with me through the moon-lit glade,
And the boldest knight,
Like the poorest wight,
Would flee the sight
With ghastly fear.
But on we dance 'neath an eerie sky
And light we prance, old Death and I!

Ah, beldame Death, old beldame Death!
We've tripped it many a time!
Our flying feet
Have weaved their beat
From the line to the Arctic clime.
I've felt your kiss
On the Gulf's abyss
And the swamps of the tropic slime.

Your barren bones
Gleam a dreary white,
Through your lank ribs drone
The winds of the night.
An eery glimmer gleams and dies
In the empty sockets of your eyes
White and bleached as the wings of a gull
And you wear a garland upon your skull,
Of ferns that grew on the swampy fen
Through the hidden bones of murdered men,
Of moss from the shores of the long-lost sea
Where the hulls of ships strew the silent lea.
First with the left foot,
Then with the right
Footing it feately through the night.
Soul to demon
And fiend to man
We've danced this dance since Time began.

Around the world
Have flown our feet
In a dizzy whirl
But our lips n'er meet.
'Tis a grisly play
And I trip and sway
With her fleshless face a span away;
And her skeleton hand is on my wrist
But I swerve aside with a dexter twist
And she seeks to press
Her grim caress
Upon my lips;
And she hops and trips
And she leaps and skips
With her bones a-clank
Over barren stone
And waving grass
And the night-winds drone
As we meet and pass
And spin again where the reeds grow rank.

Through the witch-light haze
We tread our ways
In a weird, fantastic, wizard maze.

Ah, beldame Death!
Her love is grim
And she leads to trails
That are long and dim.
She is aloof
From loves and hates —
She bears my taunts
And she waits! She waits!

And a single instant
Off my guard,
A foot a-slip
On the pallid sward,
A saddle-girth loosed,
A rended sail,
And a hand that misses
A wave-lashed rail,
A reef that lifts
'Neath the plunging strakes,
A horse that falls
Or a sword that breaks;
And the music stops
And the swirl is o'er
And my feet are still
For I dance no more.

But I'll not grudge the game I trow
As I feel her kiss on my fading brow.
And I hold her measure
Above all treasure
For to dance with Death is the only joy
That thrills and leaps and fails to cloy!
And I'll only laugh as she bends to destroy.
Left foot, right foot,
We whirl and prance
And spin away on our world-long dance!



THE TEMPTER

Something tapped me on the shoulder
Something whispered, "Come with me,
Leave the world of men behind you,
Come where care may never find you,
Come and follow, let me bind you
Where, in that dark, silent sea,
Tempest of the world ne'er rages;
There to dream away the ages,
Heedless of Time's turning pages,
Only come with me."

"Who are you?" I asked the phantom,
"I am rest from Hate and Pride.
I am friend to king and beggar,
I am Alpha and Omega,
I was councilor to Hagar
But men call me Suicide."
I was weary of tide breasting,
Weary of the world's behesting,
And I lusted for the resting
As a lover for his bride.

And my soul tugged at its moorings
And it whispered, "Set me free.
I am weary of this battle,
Of this world of human cattle,
All this dreary noise and prattle.
This you owe to me."
Long I sat and long I pondered,
On the life that I had squandered,
O'er the paths that I had wandered
Never free.

In the shadow panorama
Passed life's struggles and its fray.
And my soul tugged with new vigor,
Huger grew the phantom's figure,
As I slowly tugged the trigger,

Saw the world fade swift away.
Through the fogs old Time came striding,
Radiant clouds were 'bout me riding,
As my soul went gliding, gliding,
From the shadow into day.



AFTER THE TRUMPS ARE SOUNDED

After the trumps are sounded
Over the fading world
After the drums are silent
And the lastmost flag is furled,
May we enjoy what we long for
A boon that we sinners may tell
The most that we have to hope for
A comfortable berth in Hell.

