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Published and edited by Donald A. Wollheim,
at 98-50 67th Avenue, Forest Hills, N.Y.
For the purpose of reprinting occasional
pieces of fantastic poetry from the pages
of obscure fantasy publications.
Member of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association

Vol. 1 Number 1

March 1944

THREE POEMS OF ROBERT E. HOWARD

Robert E. Howard is one of the masters of weird fiction and yet is one who has been sadly neglected by the makers of anthologies and the memory of fantasy historians. What the reason for this can be has never been clear...it may be, we hope it is, pure oversight.

Howard, born in Texas in 1906, died by his own hand June 11, 1936. In those thirty years he had achieved the plaudits of the world of weird enthusiasts; had enjoyed the respect of such men as H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, and that crew. His death was a great shock to all.

We reprint herewith three poems which appeared in the non-professional press. The two "Voices of the Night" appeared in the long defunct "Fantasy Fan", the third was published in "The Phantasmagoria" for August 1940.

VOICES OF THE NIGHT

1. 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 the 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, visions, grvnhons, Nothing, and the Night,
Down, down, red specters, 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 a 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 crow,
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-snells that bind and blind,
Since even the stars are soisome, foul and fell,
Let me glut deep with memory dreams of Hell.

2. Babel

Now in the gloom the pulsing drums repeat,
And all the night is filled with evil sound:
I hear the throb'ins 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 unholv 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 sphére 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?

SONG AT MIDNIGHT

I heard an old gibbet that crowned a bare hill
Creaking a song in the midnight chill:
And I shivered to hear that grisly refrain
That moaned in the night through the fog
and the rain.

"Oh, where are the men who came to me
And danced all night on the gallows tree?
"Gallant and peasant, man and maid,
"Many have walked in that long parade.
"My chains are broken and red with rust.
"My wood is scaled with the moldy crust.
"Have men forgotten their debt to me,
"That they come no more to the gallows tree?"

The drear wind moaned for a dark refrain,
And a raven called in the drifting rain:
"Oh, where are the feasts that awaited me
Long, long ago on the gibbet tree?"

A slow-worm spoke from the gallows foot:
"Death is spoils for a crow to loot.
"The winds and the rain they worked their
will,
"The kites and the ravens have had their fill.
"But last of all when the chains broke free.
"The fruit of the gallows came to me."
"Men and their works so swiftly past.
"Come to a feast for the worms at last."
"Here I have gnawed on this marrow food.
"Where now I gnaw on this crumbling wood.
"For men and their works are a feast for me--
"The bones, and the noose, and the gallows tree."

