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Sepulchres

Sonnets

Solcata ho fronte, occhi incavati intenti, 1
crin fulvo, emunte guance, ardito aspetto,
labbro tumido acceso, e tersi denti,
capo chino, bel collo, e largo petto;

giuste membra, vestir semplice eletto;
ratti i passi, i pensier, gli atti, gli accenti;
sobrio, umano, leal, prodigo, schietto;
avverso al mondo, avversi a me gli eventi:

talor di lingua, e spesso di man prode; 10
mesto i più giorni e solo, ognor pensoso,
pronto, iracondo, inquieto, tenace:

di vizi ricco e di virtù, do lode
alla ragion, ma corro ove al cor piace:
morte sol mi darà fama e riposo.

I*

A furrowed brow, eyes staring and sunk deep; 1
 Hair tawny, cheekbones showing through, bold-faced;
 Lips that are full and red, with gleaming teeth;
 Head bent, a fine-set neck and a broad chest;

Good limbs, clothes that are choice and plain and neat;
 Rapid in walking, thoughts, deeds, what I say;
 Sober, humane, loyal, prodigal and straight;
 Cold to the world, which turns away from me;

Sometimes in speech, and often brave in deed;
 Sad most days and alone, thoughtful at best, 10
 Prompt, and quick to be angry, restless, strong;

Rich in virtues and vice, I praise and laud
 Reason, but, where my heart goes, go along:
 And only death will give me fame and rest.

Non son chi fui – perì di noi gran parte: 1
questo che avanza è sol languore e pianto.
E secco è il mirto, e son le foglie sparte
del lauro, speme al giovenil mio canto.

Perché dal dì ch'empia licenza e Marte
vestivan me del lor sanguineo manto,
cieca è la mente e guasto il core, ed arte
la fame d'oro, arte è in me fatta, e vanto.

Ché se pur sorge di morir consiglio, 10
a mia fiera ragion chiudon le porte
furor di gloria, e carità di figlio.

Tal di me schiavo, e d'altri, e della sorte,
conosco il meglio ed al peggior mi appiglio,
e so invocare e non darmi la morte.

II*

I am not what I was – so much is lost: 1
 Nothing remains but to lament and weep.
 Myrtle* is withered, and those leaves dispersed
 That crowned the laurel,* once my youthful hope.

Since Mars and irresponsible revolt
 Mantled me, as they always do, in blood,
 I have been blind, heartbroken, and my art
 A thirst for gold, of which I'm all too proud.

And even when I think it best to die,
 The door to this proud purpose is slammed shut 10
 By rage for fame, and filial piety.

Slave to myself, to others and to fate,
 I take the worse, though see the better way,
 And call on death, and yet fight shy of it.

Forse perché della fatal quiete
tu sei l'immagine a me sì cara vieni
o Sera! E quando ti corteggian liete
le nubi estive e i zeffiri sereni, 1

e quando dal nevoso aere inquiete
tenebre e lunghe all'universo meni,
sempre scendi invocata, e le secrete
vie del mio cor soavemente tieni.

Vagar mi fai co' miei pensier su l'orme
che vanno al nulla eterno; e intanto fugge 10
questo reo tempo, e van con lui le torme

delle cure onde meco egli si strugge;
e mentre io guardo la tua pace, dorme
quello spirto guerrier ch'entro mi rugge.

III*

Is it because you seem the very sister 1
 Of our fatal quiescence you are dear,
 O Evening? Whether courted by a cluster
 Of summer clouds and gentle zephyrs, or

Whether from snow-filled skies you slowly loose
 Long-lasting shadows on the troubled world,
 You always come invoked, and softly trace
 Those secret ways in which my heart's enthralled.

You send my contemplation wandering 10
 Towards eternal nothingness. Time flies,
 This bad time flies, and with it bears along

This band of cares, killing me as it dies.
 And while I look upon your peace, you bring
 Peace to the spirit that within me roars.

E tu ne' carmi avrai perenne vita 1
sponda che Arno saluta in suo cammino
partendo la città che del latino
nome accogliea finor l'ombra fuggita.

Già dal tuo ponte all'onda impaurita
il papale furore e il ghibellino
mescean gran sangue, ove oggi al pellegrino
del fero vate la magion si addita.

Per me cara, felice, inclita riva 10
ove sovente i pie' leggiadri mosse
colei che vera al portamento Diva

in me volgeva sue luci beate,
mentr'io sentia dai crin d'oro commosse
spirar ambrosia l'aure innamorate.

Fugitive Pieces
and Odes

Contro Lamberti

“Che fa Lamberti
uomo dottissimo?” 1
“Stampa un Omero
laboriosissimo.”
“Commenta?” “No.”
“Traduce?” “Oibò.
Le prime prove ripassando va,
ed ogni mese un foglio dà,
talché in dieci anni lo finirà –
se pur Bodoni pria non morrà.” 10
“Lavoro eterno!”
“Paga il governo.”

*Against Lamberti**

“What is Lamberti doing,
 That learned man?” 1
 “Printing a Homer
 He works hard upon.”
 “Does he comment?” “Oh no!”
 “Does he translate?” “Oh! Oh!
 He is revising his first proof,
 And issues every month one leaf;
 We’ll see it end with the decade;
 Unless Bodoni is already dead.” 10
 “That is a work undying!”
 “The Government is paying.”

*Sepulchres**

For Ippolito Pindemonte

*Deorum manium
iura sancta sunt.*
XII Tab.*

All'ombra de' cipressi e dentro l'urne 1
 confortate di pianto è forse il sonno
 della morte men duro? Ove più il sole
 per me alla terra non fecondi questa
 bella d'erbe famiglia e d'animali,
 e quando vaghe di lusinghe innanzi
 a me non danzeran l'ore future,
 né da te, dolce amico, udrò più il verso
 e la mesta armonia che lo governa,
 né più nel cor mi parlerà lo spirto 10
 delle vergini Muse e dell'amore –
 unico spirto a mia vita raminga –
 qual fia ristoro a' dì perduti un sasso
 che distingua le mie dalle infinite
 ossa che in terra e in mar semina morte?
 Vero è ben, Pindemonte! Anche la Speme,
 ultima dea, fugge i sepolcri, e involve
 tutte cose l'oblio nella sua notte;
 e una forza operosa le affatica 20
 di moto in moto; e l'uomo e le sue tombe
 e l'estreme sembianze e le reliquie
 della terra e del ciel traveste il tempo.
 Ma perché pria del tempo a sé il mortale
 invidierà l'illusion che spento
 pur lo sofferma al limitar di Dite?
 Non vive ei forse anche sotterra, quando
 gli sarà muta l'armonia del giorno,
 se può destarla con soavi cure
 nella mente de' suoi? Celeste è questa 30
 corrispondenza d'amorosi sensi,
 celeste dote è negli umani; e spesso
 per lei si vive con l'amico estinto
 e l'estinto con noi, se pia la terra
 che lo raccolse infante e lo nutriva,
 nel suo grembo materno ultimo asilo
 porgendo, sacre le reliquie renda

Shaded by cypresses, and kept in urns, 1
 Consoled by weeping, is the sleep of death
 Really not quite so rigid? When the sun
 For me at length no longer fills the earth
 With such a family of plants and beasts,
 And when the hours to come no longer dance
 Bright and illusory before my eyes,
 And when, dear friend, I hear your verse no longer
 With that sad music which decides its rhythm,
 And when the spirit in my heart no longer 10
 Speaks of the virgin Muses and of love
 (That spirit all that guides my wandering ways),
 What solace for days lost would be a stone
 Made to distinguish mine from other, countless
 Bones which death scatters over land and sea?
 For truly, Pindemonte, even Hope,
 Last of the gods to go, deserts the tomb;
 Oblivion draws all things into its night;
 A force that never tires wears all things out,
 Never at rest; and man and tombs of men, 20
 The final shape of things, and the remains
 Of land and sea are all transformed by time.
 But why – before time does – must man begrudge
 Himself the illusion which, when he is dead,
 Yet stops him at the doorway into Dis?*
 Buried, does he not go on living, with
 Day's harmony to him inaudible,
 If he rouse this illusion with sweet care
 In friendly memories? It is heaven-sent,
 This correspondence of such deep affection, 30
 A heavenly gift for human beings; and often
 This means we go on living with our friend,
 And he with us, if reverently the earth,
 Which took him as a child and nourished him,
 Offers a final refuge in her lap,
 And keeps the sacredness of his remains

dall'insultar de' nembi e dal profano
 piede del vulgo, e serbi un sasso il nome,
 e di fiori odorata arbore amica
 le ceneri di molli ombre consoli. 40

Sol chi non lascia eredità d'affetti
 poca gioia ha dell'urna; e se pur mira
 dopo l'esequie, errar vede il suo spirto
 fra 'l compianto de' templi acherontei,
 o ricovrarsi sotto le grandi ale
 del perdono d'Iddio: ma la sua polve
 lascia alle ortiche di deserta gleba
 ove né donna innamorata preghi,
 né passeggiar solingo oda il sospiro
 che dal tumulo a noi manda Natura. 50

Pur nuova legge impone oggi i sepolcri
 fuor de' guardi pietosi, e il nome a' morti
 contende. E senza tomba giace il tuo
 sacerdote, o Talia, che a te cantando
 nel suo povero tetto educò un lauro
 con lungo amore, e t'appendea corone;
 e tu gli ornavi del tuo riso i canti
 che il lombardo pungean Sardanapàlo,
 cui solo è dolce il muggito de' buoi
 che dagli antri abdüani e dal Ticino 60
 lo fan d'ozi beato e di vivande.

O bella Musa, ove sei tu? Non sento
 spirar l'ambrosia, indizio del tuo nume,
 fra queste piante ov'io siedo e sospiro
 il mio tetto materno. E tu venivi
 e sorridevi a lui sotto quel tiglio
 ch'or con dimesse frondi va fremendo
 perché non copre, o dea, l'urna del vecchio
 cui già di calma era cortese e d'ombre.
 Forse tu fra plebei tumuli guardi 70
 vagolando ove dorma il sacro capo
 del tuo Parini? A lui non ombre pose
 tra le sue mura la città, lasciva
 d'evirati cantori allettatrice,

From outrage of the storm-clouds and profane
 Feet trampling, and a stone preserves his name,
 And fragrantly in bloom a friendly tree
 Comforts his ashes in its gentle shade. 40

Only who leaves no legacy of love
 Has little joy in urns; and should he look
 Beyond the funeral rites, he sees his spirit
 Straying lamenting in the infernal regions
 Or sheltering underneath the enormous wings
 Of God's forgiveness: but he leaves his dust
 To nettles spreading on untended turf,
 Where neither loving woman offers prayers,
 Nor solitary traveller hears the sigh
 Which Nature sends to us out of the tomb. 50

And yet today's new law sets tombs apart
 From reverent glances, and denies the dead
 Their glorious name. So now, Thalia, your priest*
 Is lying untombed who, singing in your praise
 Under his poor roof, cultivated laurel
 With constant love, and hung up crowns to you;
 Your laugh adorned those songs of his which hit
 The Sardanapalus* of Lombardy,
 Whose only pleasure lies in lowing herds
 From Adda's hollows and the broad Ticino 60
 Blessing his idleness with food and drink.

Where are you, Muse? I do not catch the scent
 Ambrosia breathes, the token of your presence,
 Among these shades where I sit down to sigh
 My mother's house. And yet you used to come
 And smile at him beneath that very lime
 Whose drooping foliage shakes and shudders since
 It does not shroud the urn of that old man
 To whom it always lent such peace and shade.
 Perhaps you stray among the meanest graves, 70
 Searching to find where sleeps the sacred head
 Of your Parini? Not a tree to shade him
 Inside that city's walls, that city* lewd
 Enough to harbour enervated singers!

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