

Sepulchres

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Ugo Foscolo

Translated by

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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 inquieta
tenebre e lunghe all'universo meni,
sempre scendi invocata, e le segrete
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.