

1881

ROSA MYSTICA

Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar (1854-1900) - An Irish-born English poet, novelist, and playwright. Considered an eccentric, he was the leader of the aesthetic movement that advocated "art for art's sake" and was once imprisoned for two years with hard labor for homosexual practices. Rosa Mystica (1881) - A collection of Wilde's shorter poems which includes Helas, Requiescat, Salve Saturnia Tellus, San Miniato, Ave Maria, Plena Gratia, Italia, Rome Unvisited, and more.

HELAS

To drift with every passion till my soul
 Is a stringed lute on which
 all winds can play, Is it for this that I have given away
 Mine ancient wisdom, and austere control?
 Methinks my life is a twice-written scroll
 Scrawled over on some boyish holiday
 With idle songs for pipe and virelay
 Which do but mar the secret of the whole.

Surely that was a time I might have trod
 The sunlit heights, and from life's dissonance
 Struck one clear chord to reach the ears of God;
 is that time dead? lo! with a little rod
 I did but touch the honey of romance
 And must I lose a soul's inheritance?

REQUIESCAT

Tread lightly, she is near
 Under the snow, Speak gently, she can
 hear
 The daisies grow.

All her bright golden hair
 Tarnished with rust, She that was young
 and fair
 Fallen to dust.

Lily-like, white as snow, She hardly knew
 She was a woman, so
 Sweetly she grew.

Coffin-board, heavy stone, Lie on her breast,
 I vex my heart alone
 She is at rest.

Peace, Peace, she cannot hear
 Lyre or sonnet, All my life's buried
 here,
 Heap earth upon it.

Avignon

SALVE SATURNIA TELLUS

I reached the Alps: the soul within me burned
 Italia, my Italia, at thy name:
 And when from out the mountain's heart I came
 And saw the land for which my life had yearned,
 I laughed as one who some great prize had earned:
 And musing on the story of thy fame
 I watched the day, till marked with wounds of flame
 The turquoise sky to burnished gold was turned
 The pine-trees waved as waves a woman's hair,
 And in the orchards every twining spray
 Was breaking into flakes of blossoming foam:
 But when I knew that far away at Rome
 In evil bonds a second Peter lay,
 I wept to see the land so very fair.

Turin

SAN MINIATO

See, I have climbed the mountain side
Up to this holy house of
God, Where once that Angel-Painter trod
Who say the heavens
opened wide, And throned upon the crescent moon
The Virginal
white Queen of Grace, Mary! could I but see thy face
Death could
not come at all too soon.

O crowned by God with thorns and pain!
Mother of Christ! O mystic wife!
My heart is weary of this life
And over-sad to sing again.
O crowned by, God with love and flame!
O crowned by Christ the Holy One!
O listen ere the searching sun
Show to the world my sin and
shame.

AVE MARIA PLENA GRATIA

Was this his coming! I had hoped to see
A scene wondrous glory,
as was told Of some great God who a rain of gold
Broke open bars
and fell on Danae: Or a dread vision as when Semele
Sickenning for
love and unappeased desire Prayed to see God's clear body, and
the fire
Caught her white limbs and slew her utterly: With such
glad dreams I sought this holy place, And now with wondering
eyes and heart I stand
Before this supreme mystery of Love: A
kneeling girl with passionless pale face, An angel with a lily in his
hand, And over both with outstretched wings the Dove.

Florence

ITALIA

Italia! thou art fallen, though with sheen
Of battle-spears thy
clamorous armies stride From the North Alps to the Sicilian tide!

Ay! fallen, though the nations hail thee
Queen Because rich gold in
every town is seen, An on thy sapphire lake, in tossing pride
Of
wind-filled vans thy myriad galleys ride Beneath one flag of red
and white and green.

O Fair and Strong! O Strong and Fair in vain!

Look southward where Rome's desecrated town
Lies mourning for
her God-anointed King? Look heavenward! shall God allow this
thing? Nay! but some flame-girt Raphael shall come down, And
smite the Spoiler with the sword of pain.

Venice

SONNET

I wandered in Scoglietto's green retreat, The oranges on each
o'erhanging spray Burned as bright lamps of gold to shame the
day Some startled bird with fluttering wings and fleet Made snow
of all the blossoms, at my feet Like silver moons the pale narcissi
lay: And the curved waves that streaked the sapphire bay Laughed
i' the sun, and life seemed very sweet.

Outside the young boy-priest passed singing clear, "Jesus the Son
of Mary has been slain, O come and fill his sepulchre with
flowers." Ah, God! Ah, God! those dear Hellenic hours Had
drowned all memory of thy bitter pain, The Cross, the Crown, the
Soldiers, and the Spear.

Genoa, Holy Week

ROME UNVISITED

I The corn has turned from gray to red, Since first my spirit
wandered forth From the drear cities of the north, And to Italia's
mountains fled.

And here I set my face toward home, For all my pilgrimage is
done, Although, methinks, yon blood-red sun Marshals the way to
Holy Rome.

O Blessed Lady, who dost hold Upon the seven hills thy reign!
O Mother without blot or stain, Crowned with bright crowns of
triple gold!

O Roma, Roma, at thy feet I lay this barren gift of song!

For, ah! the way is steep and long That leads unto thy sacred street.

II And yet what joy it were for me To turn my feet unto the south,
And journeying toward the Tiber mouth To kneel again at Fiesole!

And wandering through the tangled pines That break the gold of
Arno's stream, To see the purple mist and gleam Of morning on
the Apennines.

By many a vineyard-hidden home, Orchard, and olive-garden
gray, Till from the drear Campagna's way The seven hills bear up
the dome!

III A pilgrim from the northern seas What joy for me to seek alone
The wondrous Temple, and the throne Of Him who holds the
awful keys!

When, bright with purple and with gold, Come priest and holy
Cardinal, And borne above the heads of all The gentle Shepherd of
the Fold.

O joy to see before I die The only God-anointed King, And hear the
silver trumpets ring A triumph as He passes by.

Or at the altar of the shrine Holds high the mystic sacrifice, And
shows a God to human eyes Beneath the veil of bread and wine.

IV For lo, what changes time can bring!

The cycles of revolving years May free my heart from all its
fears, And teach my lips a song to sing.

Before yon field of trembling gold Is garnered into dusty sheaves,
Or ere the autumn's scarlet leaves Flutter as birds adown the wold,
I may have run the glorious race, And caught the torch while yet
aflame, And called upon the holy name Of Him who now doth
hide His face.

Aruna

URBS SACRA AETERNA

Rome! What a scroll of History thine has been!

In the first days thy sword republican Ruled the whole world for
many an age's span: Then of thy peoples thou wert crowned
Queen, Till in thy streets the bearded Goth was seen; And now
upon thy walls the breezes fan (Ah, city crowned by God,
discrowned by man!) The hated flag of red and white and green.

When was thy glory! when in search for power Thine eagles flew
to greet the double sun, And all the nations trembled at thy rod?
Nay, but thy glory tarried for this hour, When pilgrims kneel
before the Holy One, The prisoned shepherd of the Church of God.

SONNET

On Hearing the Dies Irae Sung in the Sistine Chapel Nay, Lord, not
thus! white lilies in the spring, Sad olive-groves, or sliver-breasted
dove, Teach me more clearly of Thy life and love Than terrors of
red flame and thundering.

The empurpled vines dear memories of Thee bring: A bird at
evening flying to its nest, Tells me of One who had no place of rest:

I think it is of Thee the sparrows sing.

Come rather on some autumn afternoon, When red and brown are
burnished on the leaves, And the fields echo to the gleaner's song,

Come when the splendid fulness of the moon Looks down upon
the rows of golden sheaves, And reap Thy harvest: we have waited
long.

EASTER DAY

The silver trumpets rang across the Dome: The people knelt upon
the ground with awe: And borne upon the necks of men I saw,
Like some great God, the Holy Lord of Rome.

Priest-like, he wore a robe more white than foam, And, king-like,
swathed himself in royal red, Three crowns of gold rose high upon
his head: In splendor and in light the Pope passed home.

My heart stole back across wide wastes of years To One who
wandered by a lonely sea, And sought in vain for any place of rest:
"Foxes have holes, and every bird its nest, I, only I, must wander
wearily, And bruise My feet, and drink wine salt with tears."

E TENEBRIS

Come down, O Christ, and help me! reach thy hand, For I am
drowning in a stormier sea Than Simon on Thy lake of Galilee: The
wine of life is spilt upon the sand, My heart is as some famine-
murdered land, Whence all good things have perished utterly, And
well I know my soul in Hell must lie If I this night before God's
throne should stand.

"He sleeps perchance, or rideth to the chase, Like Baal, when his
prophets howled that name From morn to noon on Carmel's
smitten height." Nay, peace, I shall behold before the night, The
feet of brass, the robe more white than flame, The wounded hands,
the weary human face.

VITA NUOVA

I stood by the unvintageable sea Till the wet waves drenched face
and hair with spray, The long red fires of the dying day Burned in
the west; the wind piped drearily; And to the land the clamorous
gulls did flee: "Alas!" I cried, "my life is full of pain, And who can
garner fruit or golden grain, From these waste fields which travail
ceaselessly!" My nets gaped wide with many a break and flaw
Nathless I threw them as my final cast Into the sea, and waited for
the end.

When lo! a sudden glory! and I saw The argent splendor of white
limbs ascend, And in that joy forgot my tortured past.

MADONNA MIA

A lily girl, not made for this world's pain, With brown, soft hair
close braided by her ears, And longing eyes half veiled by
slumbrous tears Like bluest water seen through mists of rain; Pale
cheeks whereon no love hath left its stain, Red underlip drawn in
for fear of love, And white throat, whiter than the silvered dove,
Through whose wan marble creeps one purple vein.

Yet, though my lips shall praise her without cease, Even to kiss her
feet I am not bold, Being o'ershadowed by the wings of awe.

Like Dante, when he stood with Beatrice Beneath the flaming
Lion's breast and saw The seventh Crystal, and the Stair of Gold.

THE NEW HELEN

Where hast thou been since round the walls of Troy The sons of
God fought in that great emprise? Why dost thou walk our
common earth again? Hast thou forgotten that impassioned boy,
His purple galley, and his Tyrian men, And treacherous
Aphrodite's mocking eyes? For surely it was thou, who, like a star
Hung in the silver silence of the night, Didst lure the Old World
chivalry and might Into the clamorous crimson waves of war!

Or didst thou rule the fire-laden moon? In amorous Sidon was thy
temple built Over the light and laughter of the sea? Where, behind
lattice scarlet-wrought and gilt, Some brown-limbed girl did weave
thee tapestry, All through the waste and wearied hours of noon;
Till her wan cheek with flame of passion burned, And she rose up
the sea-washed lips to kiss Of some glad Cyprian sailor, safe
returned From Calpe and the cliffs of Herakles!

No! thou art Helen, and none other one!

It was for thee that young Sarpedon died, And Memnon's
manhood was untimely spent; It was for thee gold-crested Hector
tried With Thetis' child that evil race to run, In the last year of thy
beleaguerment; Ay! even now the glory of thy fame Burns in those
fields of trampled asphodel, Where the high lords whom Ilion
knew so well Clash ghostly shields, and call upon thy name.

Where hast thou been? in that enchanted land Whose slumbering
vales forlorn Calypso knew, Where never mower rose to greet the
day But all unswathed the trammeling grasses grew, And the sad
shepherd saw the tall corn stand Till summer's red had changed to
withered gray? Didst thou lie there by some Lethaeon stream Deep
brooding on thine ancient memory, The crash of broken spears, the
fiery gleam From shivered helm, the Grecian battle-cry? Nay, thou

were hidden in that hollow hill With one who is forgotten utterly,
 That discrowned Queen men call the Erycine; Hidden away that
 never might'st thou see The face of her, before whose mouldering
 shrine To-day at Rome the silent nations kneel; Who gat from joy
 no joyous gladdening, But only Love's intolerable pain, Only a
 sword to pierce her heart in twain, Only the bitterness of child-
 bearing.

The lotos-leaves which heal the wounds of Death Lie in thy hand;
 O, be thou kind to me, While yet I know the summer of my days;
 For hardly can my tremulous lips draw breath To fill the silver
 trumpet with thy praise, So bowed am I before thy mystery; So
 bowed and broken on Love's terrible wheel, That I have lost all
 hope and heart to sing, Yet care I not what ruin time may bring
 If in thy temple thou wilt let me kneel.

Alas, alas, thou wilt not tarry here, But, like that bird, the servant
 of the sun, Who flies before the north wind and the home.

So wilt thou fly our evil land and drear, Back to the tower of thine
 old delight, And the red lips of young Euphorion; Nor shall I ever
 see thy face again, But in this poisonous garden must I stay,
 Crowning my brows with the thorn-crown of pain, Till all my
 loveless life shall pass away.

O Helen! Helen! Helen! Yet awhile, Yet for a little while, O tarry
 here, Till the dawn cometh and the shadows flee!

For in the gladsome sunlight of thy smile Of heaven or hell I have
 no thought or fear, Seeing I know no other god but thee: No other
 god save him, before whose feet In nets of gold the tired planets
 move, The incarnate spirit of spiritual love Who in thy body holds
 his joyous seat.

Thou wert not born as common women are!

But, girt with silver splendor of the foam, Didst from the depths of
 sapphire seas arise!

And at thy coming some immortal star, Bearded with flame, blazed
 in the Eastern skies; And waked the shepherds on thine island
 home.

Thou shalt not die! no asps of Egypt creep Close at thy heels to
 taint the delicate air; No sullen-blooming poppies stain thy hair,
 Those scarlet heralds of eternal sleep.

Lily of love, pure and inviolate!
 Tower of ivory! red rose of fire!

Thou hast come down our darkness to illumine: For we, close-caught
in the wide nets of Fate, Wearied with waiting for the World's
Desire, Aimlessly wandered in the house of gloom.

Aimlessly sought some slumberous anodyne For wasted lives, for
lingering wretchedness, Till we beheld thy re-arisen shrine, And
the white glory of thy loveliness.

THE END