Poets Inspired by Rome

Throughout the centuries Rome has been a celebrated city! It has been visited by architects, painters, musicians and poets who all were enthused by the beauty, light and inspiration the eternal city reflects. From George Eliot, Goethe, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, Henry James, Edith Wharton, Oscar Wilde and James Joyce were just a few of the international talents who were attracted to this cradle of art and culture, not to mention the Italians; Carlo Goldoni, Luigi Pirandello and Pierpaolo Pasolini, and many more infatuated by the landscapes and human genius that is...Rome!
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Locations of monuments in the City - See index in previous page
1 - James Fenimore Cooper
American Author
Burlington 1789 – Cooperstown 1851

The water turns bronze into crystal, creating a dreamlike reality. This fountain keeps the tune and rhythm which only a fluid substance can convey to a motionless stone. We hear in that basin sound the echo of Bernini’s foolishness. Who is not accustomed to the eternity is caught by a vertigo.

(Tritone Fountain)

2 - Nathaniel Hawthorne
American Author
Salem 1804 – Plymouth 1864

I went out to-day, and going along the Via Felice and Via delle Quattro Fontane, came unawares to the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, on the summit of the Esquilino Hill. I entered, and found myself in a broad and noble nave, the simplest and grandest, it seems to me, that I have ever seen.

(Santa Maria Maggiore)
3 - Edgar Allan Poe
American Author
Boston 1809 – Baltimore 1849

We are not impotent – we pallid stones. / Not all our power is gone – not all our fame - / Not all the magic of our high renown - / Not all the wonder that encircles us - / Not all the mysteries that in us lie - / Not all the memories that hang upon / And cling around about us as a garment, / Clothing us in a robe of more than glory.
(Temple of Castore and Polluce)

4 - William Dean Howells
American Author
Martins Ferry 1837 – New York 1920

I’ve heard about the accomplishment of the monument to the first King of Italy. So Roma, the eternal Roma, renovated the temples to Caesars and gives a new breath to life. Everywhere in the world cities, temples, bridges and aqueducts point to the presence of Roma. But Roma must go on building in Roma to keep alive its own magnificence.
(Monument of Vittorio Emanuele)
5 - Henry James
American Author
New York 1843 – London 1916

Inside the Pantheon I fell into the fathomless abyss of history. Does still exist a passionate pilgrim. Moving inside these walls, who can’t perceive air, light, the faintness of the stones, imbued with the obsessive ghosts of time, pervaded by the desolated loneliness of memories and by the impalpable mist of the reminiscences?
(Pantheon)

6 - Percy Bysshe Shelley
English Poet
Field Place 1792 – Livorno 1822

Another time the Crucifix was displayed in S. Marcello. The office was held between six and seven o’clock afternoon, and it was remarkable because the church was dim and mysterious, and very crowded too. The Crucifix, carried by three priests moving as one man, was displayed under a sort of canopy near the high altar, which was the only lighted part of the church.
(Crucifix of San Marcello)
Augusto wanted the dramatic nature of Roma to show itself in Marcello’s name. In the stateliness of the stones we see the ancient image of its civil potency. The monuments of Roma, softened by shadows and twilight, arise from immortal distances and lose themselves in the profound vision of a unique sky before God.
(Theater of Marcello)

Then, pushing the stilt, the king lays out the walls by the furrow: / a white bull and a white cow pull the plough. / As I found these walls, he said, be present, / oh, Jupiter, oh, father Mars, o mother Vesta! / You all deities whom it’s pious to invoke, turn your mind / and under your cover may this work arise for me. For long may last the mighty kingdom of this town, / may the East and the West be conquered by it.
(The Tempio di Vesta)
9 - Francesco Petrarca  
**Italian Author**  
Arezzo 1304 – Arqua’ 1374

So you reach Roma at last, this ruler and leader of things, and anybody is unwise if admires other towns without having seen it. Walking about Roma involves its sacrality, because the visitor not only crosses the walls of a town, but gives up at the same time the old man for the new one.  
*(The Arch of Constantine)*

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10 - Miguel de Cervantes  
**Spanish Author**  
Alcala’ de Henares 1547 – Madrid 1616

Oh great, oh mighty, oh sacrosanct, / noble city of Roma! I bow before you / pious, humble and new pilgrim, / astonished in front of such beauty. / There is no part of you which can’t be an example / of sacredness, as you were laid out / on the model of the city of God.  
*(Santa Maria in Aracoeli)*
11 - Johann Wolfgang Goethe
German Author
Frankfurt-am-Mein 1749 – Weimar 1832

“Everything in Roma should be looked for with the same river’s quietness. In my opinion, the school of the whole world is here, in Roma”. I like this passage from Winckelmann. Even the most vulgar individual becomes somebody in Roma; he gains at least a non-vulgar vision of life.
(Ponte Sisto )

12 - Vittorio Alfieri
Italian Author
Asti 1749 – Florence 1803

Here man has persevered in the search of truth. Here, crossing the river and time, man as celebrated the rites which express the hunger of immortality which has always devoured Christianism. Here man, singing the eternal, has weighed in centuries his poverty and richness with the patience of God.
(Santa Maria in Cosmedin)
13 - Anne Louise Germaine Necker de Stael
French Author
Paris 1766 – 1817

Nobody can open or close its marble lips without honouring the God who knows the Truth. Its blank eyes take in the earth and seas’ horizon. Its face sees in the past and future. But it has no hands to catch them and it is a motionless stone.
(Gargoyle Marble Mask at Santa Maria in Cosmedin)

14 - F. Rene’ de Chateaubriand
French Author
Saint-Malo 1768 – Paris 1848

Sometimes graceful clouds. Like light chariots drawn by the night wind, with an incomparable charm show us why the inhabitants of the Olympus appeared in these mythological heavens; sometimes it seems that in the West the ancient Roma has spread all the purple of its consuls and Caesars under the God of the days’ last steps.
(Trajan’s Markets)
15 - Stendhal
French Author
Grenoble 1783 – Paris 1842

According to Madame de Stael, when the waters of the Trevi Fountain stop gushing out, immediately a great silence falls over the city. The plentiful falling of the water into a basin surrounded by buildings, sounds higher than Bondi’s fountain on the boulevard.

(Trevi Fountain)

16 - Emile Zola
French Author
Paris 1840 – 1902

In the Foro, inside a temple concave as an ancient vase, / a pale blue night with the remote aureole of a sunset / the façade of a church rendered to God / part of the unlimited richness He lavished on Roma. / Lengthening in the sweet-scented night, the shadow / gave the sublime to the vulgarity of modern.

(Santa Francesca Romana)
17 - Gabriele D’Annunzio
Italian Author
Pescara 1863 – Gardone Riviera 1938

On the rough stone, as an elegant layer, a legion of heroes spiraled in a marble bas-relief, blossomed from artist’s imagination and sketched as on a sand surface. Everything in imitation of architecture and painting.
(Trajan’s Column)

18 - Luigi Pirandello
Italian Novelist and Playwright
Agrigento 1867 – Roma 1936

You will not see the Tevere anymore / as I saw it one day, through Roma / running between its natural steep banks: / Now a prison of grey dams and heavy bridges / shrouds the river / and leaves its windings stranded anytime / the water subsides. / Dry is the arm which used to embrace / the Two Bridges’ little island, / as though it were its sweetheart.
(Isola Tiberina)
19 - Jorge Luis Borges
Argentine Author
Buenos Aires 1899 – Geneva 1986

Marble and columns, temples and capitals, / timeless armies and roads: / I must imagine these things do exist. / I must feign that Roma did exist in the past / and the fine sand of an hourglass / covered the city which gods held dear / buried under centuries of iron.  
(Roman Forum)

20 - Pier Paolo Pasolini
Italian Author and Poet
Bologna 1922 – Roma 1975

Solely a relic of hefty arches, / in a meadow where’s foaming a sun / whose heat is calm like a sea: / shrunken there, the relic is loveless. Custom / and ceremony, quite extinct now / live in its style – and in the sun - / for those who catch its spirit and dream.  
(Palatine Hill)