

Ernest Dowson, in full Ernest Christopher Dowson (born Aug. 2, 1867, Lee, Kent, Eng.—died Feb. 23, 1900, Lewisham, London), one of the most gifted of the circle of English poets of the 1890s known as the Decadents.

In 1886 Dowson entered Queen's College, Oxford, but left in 1888 to spend six years working at his father's dry dock in the Limehouse district of London. Dowson became an active member of the Rhymers' Club, a group of writers that included William Butler Yeats and Arthur Symons. In 1891 he met the woman who would inspire some of his best poetry, Adelaide Foltinowicz, whose parents kept a modest restaurant in Soho, London. In that same year he published his best-known poem, "Non Sum Qualis Eram Bonae sub Regno Cynarae," popularly known from its refrain as "I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion." Adelaide, who was 12 years old when they met, declined his offer of marriage, but he pursued her for the next six years, drowning the pain of his unrequited love with wine and women and demanding as time went on "madder music and stronger wine."

He was received into the Roman Catholic Church about 1892. In 1894 his father died, his mother committed suicide, the family business failed, and Dowson discovered the symptoms of his tuberculosis. In 1897 Adelaide married one of her father's waiters; after that, Dowson lived mostly in France, supporting himself by contributions to *The Savoy* and translations of Émile Zola, Honoré de Balzac, Voltaire, and other French authors. He was discovered in Paris wretched, penniless, and ill by a friend, R.H. Sherard, who took him back to London, where he died in Sherard's house.

Dowson published two novels in collaboration with Arthur Moore, *A Comedy of Masks* (1893) and *Adrian Rome* (1899), and a book of short stories, *Dilemmas* (1895), but his reputation rests on his poetry: *Verses* (1896), the verse play *The Pierrot of the Minute* (1897), and *Decorations in Verse and Prose* (1899). His lyrics, much influenced by French poet Paul Verlaine and marked by meticulous attention to melody and cadence, turn the conventional world-weariness of the 1890s into a deeper sense of the sadness of things. Yeats acknowledged that much of his own technical development was due to Dowson.

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