

Classic Poetry Series

Ernest Christopher Dowson
- poems -

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Ernest Christopher Dowson(2 August 1867 – 23 February 1900)

Ernest Christopher Dowson was an English poet, novelist and short-story writer, often associated with the Decadent movement.

Ernest Dowson was born in Lee, London, in 1867. His great-uncle was Alfred Domett, a poet and politician who became Premier of New Zealand and had allegedly been the subject of Robert Browning's poem "Waring". Dowson attended The Queen's College, Oxford, but left in March 1888 before obtaining a degree.

In November 1888, he started work with his father at Dowson and Son, a dry-docking business in Limehouse, east London, which had been established by the poet's grandfather. He led an active social life, carousing with medical students and law pupils, going to music halls and taking the performers to dinner. He was also working assiduously at his writing during this time. He was a member of the Rhymers' Club, which included W. B. Yeats and Lionel Johnson. He was a frequent contributor to the such literary magazines as *The Yellow Book* and *The Savoy*.

Dowson collaborated on two unsuccessful novels with Arthur Moore, worked on a novel of his own, *Madame de Viole*, and wrote reviews for *The Critic*. Dowson was a prolific translator of French fiction, including novels by Balzac and the Goncourt brothers, and *Les Liaisons dangereuses* by Choderlos de Laclos. In 1889, aged 23, Dowson fell in love with the eleven-year-old Adelaide "Missie" Foltinowicz, daughter of a Polish restaurant owner; she is reputed to have been the subject of one his best-known poems, *Non Sum Qualis eram Bonae Sub Regno Cynarae*. He pursued her without success, and, in 1897, Dowson was crushed when she married a tailor who lodged above her father's restaurant.

In August 1894 Dowson's father, who was in the advanced stages of tuberculosis, died of an overdose of chloral hydrate. His mother, who was also consumptive, hanged herself in February 1895, and soon Dowson began to decline rapidly. Robert Sherard found Dowson almost penniless in a wine bar and took him back to the cottage in Catford, where Sherard was living. Dowson spent the last six weeks of his life at Sherard's cottage and died there of alcoholism at age 32. He was interred in the Roman Catholic section of nearby Brockley and Ladywell Cemeteries. After Dowson's death, Oscar Wilde wrote: Poor wounded wonderful fellow that he was, a tragic reproduction of all tragic poetry, like a symbol, or a scene. I hope bay leaves will be laid on his tomb and rue and myrtle

too for he knew what love was.

A Coronal

WITH HIS SONGS AND HER DAYS TO HIS LADY AND TO LOVE

Violets and leaves of vine,
Into a frail, fair wreath
We gather and entwine:
A wreath for Love to wear,
Fragrant as his own breath,
To crown his brow divine,
All day till night is near.
Violets and leaves of vine
We gather and entwine.

Violets and leaves of vine
For Love that lives a day,
We gather and entwine.
All day till Love is dead,
Till eve falls, cold and gray,
These blossoms, yours and mine,
Love wears upon his head,
Violets and leaves of vine
We gather and entwine.

Violets and leaves of vine,
For Love when poor Love dies
We gather and entwine.
This wreath that lives a day
Over his pale, cold eyes,
Kissed shut by Proserpine,
At set of sun we lay:
Violets and leaves of vine
We gather and entwine.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

A Last Word

Let us go hence: the night is now at hand;
The day is overworn, the birds all flown;
And we have reaped the crops the gods have sown;
Despair and death; deep darkness o'er the land,
Broods like an owl; we cannot understand
Laughter or tears, for we have only known
Surpassing vanity: vain things alone
Have driven our perverse and aimless band.

Let us go hence, somewhither strange and cold,
To Hollow Lands where just men and unjust
Find end of labour, where's rest for the old,
Freedom to all from love and fear and lust.
Twine our torn hands! O pray the earth enfold
Our life-sick hearts and turn them into dust.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

A Requiem

Neobule, being tired,
Far too tired to laugh or weep,
From the hours, rosy and gray,
Hid her golden face away.
Neobule, fain of sleep,
Slept at last as she desired!

Neobule! is it well,
That you haunt the hollow lands,
Where the poor, dead people stray,
Ghostly, pitiful and gray,
Plucking, with their spectral hands,
Scentless blooms of asphodel?

Neobule, tired to death
Of the flowers that I threw
On her flower-like, fair feet,
Sighed for blossoms not so sweet,
Lunar roses pale and blue,
Lilies of the world beneath.

Neobule! ah, too tired
Of the dreams and days above!
Where the poor, dead people stray,
Ghostly, pitiful and gray,
Out of life and out of love,
Sleeps the sleep which she desired.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

A Song Of The Setting Sun

A song of the setting sun!
The sky in the west is red,
And the day is all but done;
While yonder up overhead,
All too soon,
There rises so cold the cynic moon.

A Song of a Winter day!
The wind of the north doth blow,
From a sky that's chill and gray,
On fields where no crops now grow,
Fields long shorn
Of bearded barley and golden corn.

A song of a faded flower!
'Twas plucked in the tender bud,
And fair and fresh for an hour,
In a Lady's hair it stood,
Now, ah! now,
Faded it lies in the dust and low.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

A Valediction

If we must part,
Then let it be like this.
Not heart on heart,
Nor with the useless anguish of a kiss;
But touch mine hand and say:
'Until to-morrow or some other day,
If we must part'.

Words are so weak
When love hath been so strong;
Let silence speak:
'Life is a little while, and love is long;
A time to sow and reap,
And after harvest a long time to sleep,
But words are weak.'

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Ad Domnulam Suam

Little lady of my heart !
Just a little longer,
Love me: we will pass and part,
Ere this love grow stronger.

I have loved thee, Child! too well,
To do aught but leave thee :
Nay! my lips should never tell
Any tale, to grieve thee.
Little lady of my heart !
Just a little longer,
I may love thee: we will part,
Ere my love grow stronger.

Soon thou leavest fairy-land;
Darker grow thy tresses;
Soon no more of hand in hand;
Soon no more caresses !

Little lady of my heart !
Just a little longer,
Be a child: then, we will part,
Ere this love grow stronger.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Ad Manus Puellae

I was always a lover of ladies' hands!
Or ever mine heart came here to tryst,
For the sake of your carved white hands' commands;
The tapering fingers, the dainty wrist;
The hands of a girl were what I kissed.

I remember an hand like a *_fleur-de-lys_*
When it slid from its silken sheath, her glove;
With its odours passing ambergris:
And that was the empty husk of a love.
Oh, how shall I kiss your hands enough?

They are pale with the pallor of ivories;
But they blush to the tips like a curled sea-shell:
What treasure, in kingly treasuries,
Of gold, and spice for the thurible,
Is sweet as her hands to hoard and tell?

I know not the way from your finger-tips,
Nor how I shall gain the higher lands,
The citadel of your sacred lips:
I am captive still of my pleasant bands,
The hands of a girl, and most your hands.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

After Paul Verlaine-I

Tears fall within mine heart,
As rain upon the town:
Whence does this languor start,
Possessing all mine heart?

O sweet fall of the rain
Upon the earth and roofs!
Unto an heart in pain,
O music of the rain!

Tears that have no reason
Fall in my sorry heart:
What! there was no treason?
This grief hath no reason.

Nay! the more desolate,
Because, I know not why,
(Neither for love nor hate)
Mine heart is desolate.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

After Paul Verlaine-Ii

COLLOQUE SENTIMENTAL

Into the lonely park all frozen fast,
Awhile ago there were two forms who passed.

Lo, are their lips fallen and their eyes dead,
Hardly shall a man hear the words they said.

Into the lonely park, all frozen fast,
There came two shadows who recall the past.

'Dost thou remember our old ecstasy?'--
'Wherefore should I possess that memory?'--

'Doth thine heart beat at my sole name alway?
Still dost thou see my soul in visions?' 'Nay!'--

'They were fair days of joy unspeakable,
Whereon our lips were joined?'--'I cannot tell.'--

'Were not the heavens blue, was not hope high?'--
'Hope has fled vanquished down the darkling sky.'--

So through the barren oats they wandered,
And the night only heard the words they said.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

After Paul Verlaine-Iii

SPLEEN

Around were all the roses red,
The ivy all around was black.

Dear, so thou only move thine head,
Shall all mine old despairs awake!

Too blue, too tender was the sky,
The air too soft, too green the sea.

Always I fear, I know not why,
Some lamentable flight from thee.

I am so tired of holly-sprays
And weary of the bright box-tree,

Of all the endless country ways;
Of everything alas! save thee.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Amantium Irae

When this, our rose, is faded,
And these, our days, are done,
In lands profoundly shaded
From tempest and from sun:
Ah, once more come together,
Shall we forgive the past,
And safe from worldly weather
Possess our souls at last?

Or in our place of shadows
Shall still we stretch an hand
To green, remembered meadows,
Of that old pleasant land?
And vainly there foregathered,
Shall we regret the sun?
The rose of love, ungathered?
The bay, we have not won?

Ah, child! the world's dark marges
May lead to Nevermore,
The stately funeral barges
Sail for an unknown shore,
And love we vow to-morrow,
And pride we serve to-day:
What if they both should borrow
Sad hues of yesterday?

Our pride! Ah, should we miss it,
Or will it serve at last?
Our anger, if we kiss it,
Is like a sorrow past.
While roses deck the garden,
While yet the sun is high,
Doff sorry pride for pardon,
Or ever love go by.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Amor Profanus

Beyond the pale of memory,
In some mysterious dusky grove;
A place of shadows utterly,
Where never coos the turtle-dove,
A world forgotten of the sun:
I dreamed we met when day was done,
And marvelled at our ancient love.

Met there by chance, long kept apart,
We wandered through the darkling glades;
And that old language of the heart
We sought to speak: alas! poor shades!
Over our pallid lips had run
The waters of oblivion,
Which crown all loves of men or maids.

In vain we stammered: from afar
Our old desire shone cold and dead:
That time was distant as a star,
When eyes were bright and lips were red.
And still we went with downcast eye
And no delight in being nigh,
Poor shadows most uncomforted.

Ah, Lalage! while life is ours,
Hoard not thy beauty rose and white,
But pluck the pretty fleeing flowers
That deck our little path of light:
For all too soon we twain shall tread
The bitter pastures of the dead:
Estranged, sad spectres of the night.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Amor Umbratilis

A gift of Silence, sweet!
Who may not ever hear:
To lay down at your unobservant feet,
Is all the gift I bear.

I have no songs to sing,
That you should heed or know:
I have no lilies, in full hands, to fling
Across the path you go.

I cast my flowers away,
Blossoms unmeet for you!
The garland I have gathered in my day:
My rosemary and rue.

I watch you pass and pass,
Serene and cold: I lay
My lips upon your trodden, daisied grass,
And turn my life away.

Yea, for I cast you, sweet!
This one gift, you shall take:
Like ointment, on your unobservant feet,
My silence, for your sake.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

April Love

We have walked in Love's land a little way,
We have learnt his lesson a little while,
And shall we not part at the end of day,
With a sigh, a smile?

A little while in the shine of the sun,
We were twined together, joined lips forgot
How the shadows fall when day is done,
And when Love is not.

We have made no vows - there will none be broke,
Our love was free as the wind on the hill,
There was no word said we need wish unspoke,
We have wrought no ill.

So shall we not part at the end of day,
Who have loved and lingered a little while,
Join lips for the last time, go our way,
With a sigh, a smile.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Autumnal

Pale amber sunlight falls across
The reddening October trees,
That hardly sway before a breeze
As soft as summer: summer's loss
Seems little, dear! on days like these.

Let misty autumn be our part!
The twilight of the year is sweet:
Where shadow and the darkness meet
Our love, a twilight of the heart
Eludes a little time's deceit.

Are we not better and at home
In dreamful Autumn, we who deem
No harvest joy is worth a dream?
A little while and night shall come,
A little while, then, let us dream.

Beyond the pearled horizons lie
Winter and night: awaiting these
We garner this poor hour of ease,
Until love turn from us and die
Beneath the drear November trees.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Beata Solitudo

What land of Silence,
Where pale stars shine
On apple-blossom
And dew-drenched vine,
Is yours and mine?

The silent valley
That we will find,
Where all the voices
Of humankind
Are left behind.

There all forgetting,
Forgotten quite,
We will repose us,
With our delight
Hid out of sight.

The world forsaken,
And out of mind
Honour and labour,
We shall not find
The stars unkind.

And men shall travail,
And laugh and weep;
But we have vistas
Of Gods asleep,
With dreams as deep.

A land of Silence,
Where pale stars shine
On apple-blossoms
And dew-drenched vine,
Be yours and mine!

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Benedictio Domini

Without, the sullen noises of the street!
The voice of London, inarticulate,
Hoarse and blaspheming, surges in to meet
The silent blessing of the Immaculate.

Dark is the church, and dim the worshippers,
Hushed with bowed heads as though by some old spell.
While through the incense-laden air there stirs
The admonition of a silver bell.

Dark is the church, save where the altar stands,
Dressed like a bride, illustrious with light,
Where one old priest exalts with tremulous hands
The one true solace of man's fallen plight.

Strange silence here: without, the sounding street
Heralds the world's swift passage to the fire:
O Benediction, perfect and complete!
When shall men cease to suffer and desire?

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Beyond

Love's aftermath! I think the time is now
That we must gather in, alone, apart
The saddest crop of all the crops that grow,
Love's aftermath.
Ah, sweet,--sweet yesterday, the tears that start
Can not put back the dial; this is, I trow,
Our harvesting! Thy kisses chill my heart,
Our lips are cold; averted eyes avow
The twilight of poor love: we can but part,
Dumbly and sadly, reaping as we sow,
Love's aftermath.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Breton Afternoon

Here, where the breath of the scented-gorse floats through the
sun-stained air,
On a steep hill-side, on a grassy ledge, I have lain hours long
and heard
Only the faint breeze pass in a whisper like a prayer,
And the river ripple by and the distant call of a bird.

On the lone hill-side, in the gold sunshine, I will hush me and
repose,
And the world fades into a dream and a spell is cast on me;
_And what was all the strife about, for the myrtle or the rose,
And why have I wept for a white girl's paleness passing ivory!_

Out of the tumult of angry tongues, in a land alone, apart,
In a perfumed dream-land set betwixt the bounds of life and death,
Here will I lie while the clouds fly by and delve an hole where my
heart
May sleep deep down with the gorse above and red, red earth beneath.

Sleep and be quiet for an afternoon, till the rose-white angelus
Softly steals my way from the village under the hill:
_Mother of God, O Misericord, look down in pity on us,
The weak and blind who stand in our light and wreak ourselves such ill_.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Carthusians

Through what long heaviness, assayed in what strange fire,
Have these white monks been brought into the way of peace,
Despising the world's wisdom and the world's desire,
Which from the body of this death bring no release?

Within their austere walls no voices penetrate;
A sacred silence only, as of death, obtains;
Nothing finds entry here of loud or passionate;
This quiet is the exceeding profit of their pains.

From many lands they came, in divers fiery ways;
Each knew at last the vanity of earthly joys;
And one was crowned with thorns, and one was crowned with bays,
And each was tired at last of the world's foolish noise.

It was not theirs with Dominic to preach God's holy wrath,
They were too stern to bear sweet Francis' gentle sway;
Theirs was a higher calling and a steeper path,
To dwell alone with Christ, to meditate and pray.

A cloistered company, they are companionless,
None knoweth here the secret of his brother's heart:
They are but come together for more loneliness,
Whose bond is solitude and silence all their part.

O beatific life! Who is there shall gainsay,
Your great refusal's victory, your little loss,
Deserting vanity for the more perfect way,
The sweeter service of the most dolorous Cross.

Ye shall prevail at last! Surely ye shall prevail!
Your silence and austerity shall win at last:
Desire and mirth, the world's ephemeral lights shall fail,
The sweet star of your queen is never overcast.

We fling up flowers and laugh, we laugh across the wine;
With wine we dull our souls and careful strains of art;
Our cups are polished skulls round which the roses twine:
None dares to look at Death who leers and lurks apart.

Move on, white company, whom that has not sufficed!
Our viols cease, our wine is death, our roses fail:
Pray for our heedlessness, O dwellers with the Christ!
Though the world fall apart, surely ye shall prevail.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Cease Smiling, Dear! A Little While Be Sad

Cease smiling, Dear! a little while be sad,
Here in the silence, under the wan moon;
Sweet are thine eyes, but how can I be glad,
Knowing they change so soon?

For Love's sake, Dear, be silent! Cover me
In the deep darkness of thy falling hair:
Fear is upon me and the memory
Of what is all men's share.

O could this moment be perpetuate!
Must we grow old, and leaden-eyed and gray,
And taste no more the wild and passionate
Love sorrows of to-day?

Grown old, and faded, Sweet! and past desire,
Let memory die, lest there be too much ruth,
Remembering the old, extinguished fire
Of our divine, lost youth.

O red pomegranate of thy perfect mouth!
My lips' life-fruitage, might I taste and die
Here in thy garden, where the scented south
Wind chastens agony;

Reap death from thy live lips in one long kiss,
And look my last into thine eyes and rest:
What sweets had life to me sweeter than this
Swift dying on thy breast?

Or, if that may not be, for Love's sake, Dear!
Keep silence still, and dream that we shall lie,
Red mouth to mouth, entwined, and always hear
The south wind's melody,

Here in thy garden, through the sighing boughs,
Beyond the reach of time and chance and change,
And bitter life and death, and broken vows,
That sadden and estrange.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Chanson Sans Paroles

I the deep violet air,
Not a leaf is stirred;
There is no sound heard,
But afar, the rare
Trilled voice of a bird.

Is the wood's dim heart,
And the fragrant pine,
Incense, and a shrine
Of her coming. Apart,
I wait for a sign.

What the sudden hush said,
She will hear, and forsake,
Swift, for my sake,
Her green, grassy bed:
She will hear and awake!

She will hearken and glide,
From her place of deep rest,
Dove-eyed, with the breast
Of a dove, to my side:
The pines bow their crest.

I wait for a sign:
The leaves to be waved,
The tall tree-tops laved
In a flood of sunshine,
This world to be saved!

In the deep violet air,
Not a leaf is stirred;
There is no sound heard,
But afar, the rare
Trilled voice of a bird.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Cynara

Last night, ah, yesternight, betwixt her lips and mine
There fell thy shadow, Cynara! thy breath was shed
Upon my soul between the kisses and the wine;
And I was desolate and sick of an old passion,

Yea, I was desolate and bowed my head:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.
All night upon mine heart I felt her warm heart beat,
Night-long within mine arms in love and sleep she lay;
Surely the kisses of her bought red mouth were sweet;
But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,

When I awoke and found the dawn was gray:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.
I have forgot much, Cynara! gone with the wind,
Flung roses, roses riotously with the throng,
Dancing, to put thy pale, lost lilies out of mind;
But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,

Yea, all the time, because the dance was long:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.
I cried for madder music and for stronger wine,
But when the feast is finished and the lamps expire,
Then falls thy shadow, Cynara! the night is thine;
And I am desolate and sick of an old passion,

Yea, hungry for the lips of my desire:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

De Amore

Shall one be sorrowful because of love,
Which hath no earthly crown,
Which lives and dies, unknown?
Because no words of his shall ever move
Her maiden heart to own
Him lord and destined master of her own:
Is Love so weak a thing as this,
Who can not lie awake,
Solely for his own sake,
For lack of the dear hands to hold, the lips to kiss,
A mere heart-ache?

Nay, though love's victories be great and sweet,
Nor vain and foolish toys,
His crowned, earthly joys,
Is there no comfort then in love's defeat?
Because he shall defer,
For some short span of years all part in her,
Submitting to forego
The certain peace which happier lovers know;
Because he shall be utterly disowned,
Nor length of service bring
Her least awakening:
Foiled, frustrate and alone, misunderstood, discrowned,
Is Love less King?

Grows not the world to him a fairer place,
How far soever his days
Pass from his lady's ways,
From mere encounter with her golden face?
Though all his sighing be vain,
Shall he be heavy-hearted and complain?
Is she not still a star,
Deeply to be desired, worshipped afar,
A beacon-light to aid
From bitter-sweet delights, Love's masquerade?
Though he lose many things,
Though much he miss:
The heart upon his heart, the hand that clings,

The memorable first kiss;
Love that is love at all,
Needs not an earthly coronal;
Love is himself his own exceeding great reward,
A mighty lord!

Lord over life and all the ways of breath,
Mighty and strong to save
From the devouring grave;
Yea, whose dominion doth out-tyrant death,
Thou who art life and death in one,
The night, the sun;
Who art, when all things seem:
Foiled, frustrate and forlorn, rejected of to-day
Go with me all my way,
And let me not blaspheme.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Dregs

The fire is out, and spent the warmth thereof,
(This is the end of every song man sings!)
The golden wine is drunk, the dregs remain,
Bitter as wormwood and as salt as pain;
And health and hope have gone the way of love
Into the drear oblivion of lost things.
Ghosts go along with us until the end;
This was a mistress, this, perhaps, a friend.
With pale, indifferent eyes, we sit and wait
For the dropped curtain and the closing gate:
This is the end of all the songs man sings.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Epigram

Because I am idolotrous and have besought
With grievous supplication and consuming prayer,
The admirable image that my love has wrought
Out of her swan's neck and her dark, abundant hair:
The jealous gods who brook no worship save their own,
Turned my live idol marble and her heart to stone.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Exchanges

All that I had I brought,
Little enough I know;
A poor rhyme roughly wrought,
A rose to match thy snow:
All that I had I brought.

Little enough I sought:
But a word compassionate,
A passing glance, or thought,
For me outside the gate:
Little enough I sought.

Little enough I found:
All that you had, perchance!
With the dead leaves on the ground,
I dance the devil's dance.
All that you had I found.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Exile

By the sad waters of separation
Where we have wandered by divers ways,
I have but the shadow and imitation
Of the old memorial days.

In music I have no consolation,
No roses are pale enough for me;
The sound of the waters of separation
Surpasseth roses and melody.

By the sad waters of separation
Dimly I hear from an hidden place
The sigh of mine ancient adoration:
Hardly can I remember your face.

If you be dead, no proclamation
Sprang to me over the waste, gray sea:
Living, the waters of separation
Sever for ever your soul from me.

No man knoweth our desolation;
Memory pales of the old delight;
While the sad waters of separation
Bear us on to the ultimate night.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Extreme Unction

Upon the eyes, the lips, the feet,
On all the passages of sense,
The atoning oil is spread with sweet
Renewal of lost innocence.

The feet, that lately ran so fast
To meet desire, are soothly sealed;
The eyes, that were so often cast
On vanity, are touched and healed.

From troublous sights and sounds set free;
In such a twilight hour of breath,
Shall one retrace his life, or see,
Through shadows, the true face of death?

Vials of mercy! Sacring oils!
I know not where nor when I come,
Nor through what wanderings and toils,
To crave of you Viaticum.

Yet, when the walls of flesh grow weak,
In such an hour, it well may be,
Through mist and darkness, light will break,
And each anointed sense will see.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Flos Lunae

I would not alter thy cold eyes,
Nor trouble the calm fount of speech
With aught of passion or surprise.
The heart of thee I cannot reach:
I would not alter thy cold eyes!

I would not alter thy cold eyes;
Nor have thee smile, nor make thee weep:
Though all my life droops down and dies,
Desiring thee, desiring sleep,
I would not alter thy cold eyes.

I would not alter thy cold eyes;
I would not change thee if I might,
To whom my prayers for incense rise,
Daughter of dreams! my moon of night!
I would not alter thy cold eyes.

I would not alter thy cold eyes,
With trouble of the human heart:
Within their glance my spirit lies,
A frozen thing, alone, apart;
I would not alter thy cold eyes.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Grey Nights

A while we wandered (thus it is I dream!)
Through a long, sandy track of No Man's Land,
Where only poppies grew among the sand,
The which we, plucking, cast with scant esteem,
And ever sadlier, into the sad stream,
Which followed us, as we went, hand in hand,
Under the estranged stars, a road unplanned,
Seeing all things in the shadow of a dream.

And ever sadlier, as the stars expired,
We found the poppies rarer, till thine eyes
Grown all my light, to light me were too tired,
And at their darkening, that no surmise
Might haunt me of the lost days we desired,
After them all I flung those memories!

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Growth

I watched the glory of her childhood change,
Half-sorrowful to find the child I knew,
 (Loved long ago in lily-time),
Become a maid, mysterious and strange,
With fair, pure eyes - dear eyes, but not the eyes I knew
 Of old, in the olden time!

Till on my doubting soul the ancient good
Of her dear childhood in the new disguise
 Dawned, and I hastened to adore
The glory of her waking maidenhead,
And found the old tenderness within her deepening eyes,
 But kinder than before.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

If We Must Part

If we must part,
Then let it be like this.
Not heart on heart,
Nor with the useless anguish of a kiss;
But touch mine hand and say:
"Until to-morrow or some other day,
If we must part".

Words are so weak
When love hath been so strong;
Let silence speak:
"Life is a little while, and love is long;
A time to sow and reap,
And after harvest a long time to sleep,
But words are weak."

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Impenitent Ultima

Before my light goes out for ever if God should give me a choice of
graces,

I would not reck of length of days, nor crave for things to be;
But cry: 'One day of the great lost days, one face of all the faces,
Grant me to see and touch once more and nothing more to see.

'For, Lord, I was free of all Thy flowers, but I chose the world's
sad roses,

And that is why my feet are torn and mine eyes are blind with sweat,
But at Thy terrible judgment-seat, when this my tired life closes,
I am ready to reap whereof I sowed, and pay my righteous debt.

'But once before the sand is run and the silver thread is broken,
Give me a grace and cast aside the veil of dolorous years,
Grant me one hour of all mine hours, and let me see for a token
Her pure and pitiful eyes shine out, and bathe her feet with tears.'

Her pitiful hands should calm, and her hair stream down and blind me,
Out of the sight of night, and out of the reach of fear,
And her eyes should be my light whilst the sun went out behind me,
And the viols in her voice be the last sound in mine ear.

Before the ruining waters fall and my life be carried under,
And Thine anger cleave me through as a child cuts down a flower,
I will praise Thee, Lord in Hell, while my limbs are racked asunder,
For the last sad sight of her face and the little grace of an hour.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

In A Breton Cemetery

They sleep well here,
These fisher-folk who passed their anxious days
In fierce Atlantic ways;
And found not there,
Beneath the long curled wave,
So quiet a grave.

And they sleep well,
These peasant-folk, who told their lives away,
From day to market-day,
As one should tell,
With patient industry,
Some sad old rosary.

And now night falls,
Me, tempest-tost, and driven from pillar to post,
A poor worn ghost,
This quiet pasture calls;
And dear dead people with pale hands
Beckon me to their lands.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

In Spring

See how the trees and the osiers lithe
Are green bedecked and the woods are blithe,
The meadows have donned their cape of flowers,
The air is soft with the sweet May showers,
And the birds make melody:
But the spring of the soul, the spring of the soul,
Cometh no more for you or for me.

The lazy hum of the busy bees
Murmureth through the almond trees;
The jonquil flaunteth a gay, blonde head,
The primrose peeps from a mossy bed,
And the violets scent the lane.
But the flowers of the soul, the flowers of the soul,
For you and for me bloom never again.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

In Tempore Senectutis

When I am old,
And sadly steal apart,
Into the dark and cold,
Friend of my heart!
Remember, if you can,
Not him who lingers, but that other man,
Who loved and sang, and had a beating heart, -
When I am old !

When I am old,
And all Love's ancient fire
Be tremulous and cold:
My soul's desire !
Remember, if you may,
Nothing of you and me but yesterday,
When heart on heart we bid the years conspire
To make us old.

When I am old,
And every star above
Be pitiless and cold:
My life's one love !
Forbid me not to go :
Remember nought of us but long ago,
And not at last, how love and pity strove
When I grew old !

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Jadis

Erewhile, before the world was old,
When violets grew and celandine,
In Cupid's train we were enrolled:

Erewhile!

Your little hands were clasped in mine,
Your head all ruddy and sun-gold
Lay on my breast which was your shrine,
And all the tale of love was told:
Ah, God, that sweet things should decline,
And fires fade out which were not cold,
Erewhile.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Libera Me

Goddess the laughter-loving, Aphrodite, befriend!
Long have I served thine altars, serve me now at the end,
Let me have peace of thee, truce of thee, golden one, send.

Heart of my heart have I offered thee, pain of my pain,
Yielding my life for the love of thee into thy chain;
Lady and goddess be merciful, loose me again.

All things I had that were fairest, my dearest and best,
Fed the fierce flames on thine altar: ah, surely, my breast
Shrined thee alone among goddesses, spurning the rest.

Blossom of youth thou hast plucked of me, flower of my days;
Stinted I nought in thine honouring, walked in thy ways,
Song of my soul pouring out to thee, all in thy praise.

Fierce was the flame while it lasted, and strong was thy wine,
Meet for immortals that die not, for throats such as thine,
Too fierce for bodies of mortals, too potent for mine.

Blossom and bloom hast thou taken, now render to me
Ashes of life that remain to me, few though they be,
Truce of the love of thee, Cyprian, let me go free.

Goddess the laughter-loving, Aphrodite, restore
Life to the limbs of me, liberty, hold me no more
Having the first-fruits and flower of me, cast me the core.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Moritura

A song of the setting sun!
The sky in the west is red,
And the day is all but done:
While yonder up overhead,
All too soon,
There rises, so cold, the cynic moon.

A song of a winter day!
The wind of the north doth blow,
From a sky that's chill and gray,
On fields where no crops now grow,
Fields long shorn
Of bearded barley and golden corn.

A song of an old, old man!
His hairs are white and his gaze,
Long bleared in his visage wan,
With its weight of yesterdays,
Joylessly
He stands and mumbles and looks at me,

A song of a faded flower!
'Twas plucked in the tender bud,
And fair and fresh for an hour,
In a lady's hair it stood.
Now, ah, now,
Faded it lies in the dust and low.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

My Lady April

Dew on her robe and on her tangled hair;
Twin dewdrops for her eyes; behold her pass,
With dainty step brushing the young, green grass,
The while she trills some high, fantastic air,
Full of all feathered sweetness: she is fair,
And all her flower-like beauty, as a glass,
Mirrors out hope and love: and still, alas!
Traces of tears her languid lashes wear.

Say, doth she weep for very wantonness?
Or is it that she dimly doth foresee
Across her youth the joys grow less and less
The burden of the days that are to be:
Autumn and withered leaves and vanity,
And winter bringing end in barrenness.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Non Sum Qualis Eram Bonae Sub Regno Cynarae

Last night, ah, yesternight, betwixt her lips and mine
There fell thy shadow, Cynara! thy breath was shed
Upon my soul between the kisses and the wine;
And I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
Yea, I was desolate and bowed my head:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

All night upon mine heart I felt her warm heart beat,
Night-long within mine arms in love and sleep she lay;
Surely the kisses of her bought red mouth were sweet;
But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
When I awoke and found the dawn was gray:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

I have forgot much, Cynara! gone with the wind,
Flung roses, roses riotously with the throng,
Dancing, to put thy pale, lost lilies out of mind;
But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
Yea, all the time, because the dance was long:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

I cried for madder music and for stronger wine,
But when the feast is finished and the lamps expire,
Then falls thy shadow, Cynara! the night is thine;
And I am desolate and sick of an old passion,
Yea, hungry for the lips of my desire:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Nuns Of The Perpetual Adoration

Calm, sad, secure; behind high convent walls,
These watch the sacred lamp, these watch and pray:
And it is one with them when evening falls,
And one with them the cold return of day.

These heed not time; their nights and days they make
Into a long returning rosary,
Whereon their lives are threaded for Christ's sake;
Meekness and vigilance and chastity.

A vowed patrol, in silent companies,
Life-long they keep before the living Christ.
In the dim church, their prayers and penances
Are fragrant incense to the Sacrificed.

Outside, the world is wild and passionate;
Man's weary laughter and his sick despair
Entreat at their impenetrable gate:
They heed no voices in their dream of prayer.

They saw the glory of the world displayed;
They saw the bitter of it, and the sweet;
They knew the roses of the world should fade,
And be trod under by the hurrying feet.

Therefore they rather put away desire,
And crossed their hands and came to sanctuary
And veiled their heads and put on coarse attire:
Because their comeliness was vanity.

And there they rest; they have serene insight
Of the illuminating dawn to be:
Mary's sweet Star dispels for them the night,
The proper darkness of humanity.

Calm, sad, secure; with faces worn and mild:
Surely their choice of vigil is the best?
Yea! for our roses fade, the world is wild;
But there, beside the altar, there is rest.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

O Mors! Quam Amara Est Memoria Tua Homini Pacem Habenti In Substantiis Suis

Exceeding sorrow
Consumeth my sad heart!
Because to-morrow
We must depart,
Now is exceeding sorrow
All my part!

Give over playing,
Cast thy viol away:
Merely laying
Thine head my way:
Prithee, give over playing,
Grave or gay.

Be no word spoken;
Weep nothing: let a pale
Silence, unbroken
Silence prevail!
Prithee, be no word spoken,
Lest I fail!

Forget to-morrow!
Weep nothing: only lay
In silent sorrow
Thine head my way:
Let us forget to-morrow,
This one day!

Ernest Christopher Dowson

On The Birth Of A Friend's Child

Mark the day white, on which the Fates have smiled:
Eugenio and Egeria have a child.
On whom abundant grace kind Jove imparts
If she but copy either parent's parts.
Then, Muses! long devoted to her race,
Grant her Egeria's virtues and her face;
Nor stop your bounty there, but add to it
Eugenio's learning and Eugenio's wit.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Quid Non Supremus, Amantes?

Why is there in the least touch of her hands
More grace than other women's lips bestow,
If love is but a slave in fleshly bands
Of flesh to flesh, wherever love may go?

Why choose vain grief and heavy-hearted hours
For her lost voice, and dear remembered hair,
If love may cull his honey from all flowers,
And girls grow thick as violets, everywhere?

Nay! She is gone, and all things fall apart;
Or she is cold, and vainly have we prayed;
And broken is the summer's splendid heart,
And hope within a deep, dark grave is laid.

As man aspires and falls, yet a soul springs
Out of his agony of flesh at last,
So love that flesh enthalls, shall rise on wings
Soul-centred, when the rule of flesh is past.

Then, most High Love, or wreathed with myrtle sprays,
Or crownless and forlorn, nor less a star,
Thee may I serve and follow, all my days,
Whose thorns are sweet as never roses are!

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Rondeau

Ah, Manon, say, why is it we
Are one and all so fain of thee?
Thy rich red beauty debonnaire
In very truth is not more fair,
Than the shy grace and purity
That clothe the maiden maidenly;
Her gray eyes shine more tenderly
And not less bright than thine her hair;
Ah, Manon, say!
Expound, I pray, the mystery
Why wine-stained lip and languid eye,
And most unsaintly Maenad air,
Should move us more than all the rare
White roses of virginity?
Ah, Manon, say!

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Saint Germain-En-Laye

(1887-1895)

Through the green boughs I hardly saw thy face,
They twined so close: the sun was in mine eyes;
And now the sullen trees in sombre lace
Stand bare beneath the sinister, sad skies.

O sun and summer! Say in what far night,
The gold and green, the glory of thine head,
Of bough and branch have fallen? Oh, the white
Gaunt ghosts that flutter where thy feet have sped,

Across the terrace that is desolate,
And rang then with thy laughter, ghost of thee,
That holds its shroud up with most delicate,
Dead fingers, and behind the ghost of me,

Tripping fantastic with a mouth that jeers
At roseal flowers of youth the turbid streams
Toss in derision down the barren years
To death the host of all our golden dreams.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Sapientia Lunae

The wisdom of the world said unto me:
'_Go forth and run, the race is to the brave;
Perchance some honour tarrieth for thee!_'
'As tarrieth,' I said, 'for sure, the grave.'
For I had pondered on a rune of roses,
Which to her votaries the moon discloses.

The wisdom of the world said: '_There are bays:
Go forth and run, for victory is good,
After the stress of the laborious days._'
'Yet,' said I, 'shall I be the worms' sweet food,'
As I went musing on a rune of roses,
Which in her hour, the pale, soft moon discloses.

Then said my voices: '_Wherefore strive or run,
On dusty highways ever, a vain race?
The long night cometh, starless, void of sun,
What light shall serve thee like her golden face?_'
For I had pondered on a rune of roses,
And knew some secrets which the moon discloses.

'Yea,' said I, 'for her eyes are pure and sweet
As lilies, and the fragrance of her hair
Is many laurels; and it is not meet
To run for shadows when the prize is here';
And I went reading in that rune of roses
Which to her votaries the moon discloses.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Seraphita

Come not before me now, O visionary face!
Me tempest-tost, and borne along life's passionate sea;
Troublous and dark and stormy though my passage be;
Not here and now may we commingle or embrace,
Lest the loud anguish of the waters should efface
The bright illumination of thy memory,
Which dominates the night; rest, far away from me,
In the serenity of thine abiding place!

But when the storm is highest, and the thunders blare,
And sea and sky are riven, O moon of all my night!
Stoop down but once in pity of my great despair,
And let thine hand, though over late to help, alight
But once upon my pale eyes and my drowning hair,
Before the great waves conquer in the last vain fight.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Soli Cantare Periti Arcades

Oh, I would live in a dairy,
And its Colin I would be,
And many a rustic fairy
Should churn the milk with me.

Or the fields should be my pleasure,
And my flocks should follow me,
Piping a frolic measure
For Joan or Marjorie.

For the town is black and weary,
And I hate the London street;
But the country ways are cheery,
And country lanes are sweet.

Good luck to you, Paris ladies!
Ye are over fine and nice
I know where the country maid is,
Who needs not asking twice.

Ye are brave in your silks and satins,
As ye mince about the Town;
But her feet go free in pattens,
If she wear a russet gown.

If she be not queen nor goddess
She shall milk my brown-eyed herds,
And the breasts beneath her bodice
Are whiter than her curds.

So I will live in a dairy,
And its Colin I will be,
And its Joan that I will marry,
Or, haply, Marjorie.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Spleen

(For Arthur Symons)

I was not sorrowful, I could not weep,
And all my memories were put to sleep.

I watched the river grow more white and strange,
All day till evening I watched it change.

All day till evening I watched the rain
Beat wearily upon the window pane

I was not sorrowful, but only tired
Of everything that ever I desired.

Her lips, her eyes, all day became to me
The shadow of a shadow utterly.

All day mine hunger for her heart became
Oblivion, until the evening came,

And left me sorrowful, inclined to weep,
With all my memories that could not sleep.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Terre Promise

Even now the fragrant darkness of her hair
Had brushed my cheek; and once, in passing by,
Her hand upon my hand lay tranquilly:
What things unspoken trembled in the air!

Always I know, how little severs me
From mine heart's country, that is yet so far;
And must I lean and long across a bar,
That half a word would shatter utterly?

Ah might it be, that just by touch of hand,
Or speaking silence, shall the barrier fall;
And she shall pass, with no vain words at all,
But droop into mine arms, and understand!

Ernest Christopher Dowson

The Dead Child

Sleep on, dear, now
The last sleep and the best,
And on thy brow,
And on thy quiet breast
Violets I throw.

Thy scanty years
Were mine a little while;
Life had no fears
To trouble thy brief smile
With toil or tears.

Lie still, and be
For evermore a child!
Not grudgingly,
Whom life has not defiled,
I render thee.

Slumber so deep,
No man would rashly wake;
I hardly weep,
Fain only, for thy sake.
To share thy sleep.

Yes, to be dead,
Dead, here with thee to-day,--
When all is said
'Twere good by thee to lay
My weary head.

The very best!
Ah, child so tired of play,
I stand confessed:
I want to come thy way,
And share thy rest.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

The Garden Of Shadow

Love heeds no more the sighing of the wind
Against the perfect flowers: thy garden's close
Is grown a wilderness, where none shall find
One strayed, last petal of one last year's rose.

O bright, bright hair! O mouth like a ripe fruit!
Can famine be so nigh to harvesting?
Love, that was songful, with a broken lute
In grass of graveyards goeth murmuring.

Let the wind blow against the perfect flowers,
And all thy garden change and glow with spring:
Love is grown blind with no more count of hours
Nor part in seed-time nor in harvesting.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

The Moon Maiden's Song

Sleep! Cast thy canopy
Over this sleeper's brain,
Dim grow his memory,
When he wake again.

Love stays a summer night,
Till lights of morning come;
Then takes her winged flight
Back to her starry home.

Sleep! Yet thy days are mine;
Love's seal is over thee:
Far though my ways from thine,
Dim though thy memory.

Love stays a summer night,
Till lights of morning come;
Then takes her winged flight
Back to her starry home.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

The Sea-Change

Where river and ocean meet in a great tempestuous frown,
Beyond the bar, where on the dunes the white-capped rollers break;
Above, one windmill stands forlorn on the arid, grassy down:
I will set my sail on a stormy day and cross the bar and seek
That I have sought and never found, the exquisite one crown,
Which crowns one day with all its calm the passionate and the weak.

When the mad winds are unreined, wilt thou not storm, my sea?
(I have ever loved thee so, I have ever done thee wrong
In drear terrestrial ways.) When I trust myself to thee
With a last great hope, arise and sing thine ultimate, great song
Sung to so many better men, O sing at last to me,
That which when once a man has heard, he heeds not over long.

I will bend my sail when the great day comes; thy kisses on my face
Shall seal all things that are old, outworn; and anger and regret
Shall fade as the dreams and days shall fade, and in thy salt embrace,
When thy fierce caresses blind mine eyes and my limbs grow stark and set,
All that I know in all my mind shall no more have a place:
The weary ways of men and one woman I shall forget.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

The Three Witches

All the moon-shed nights are over,
And the days of gray and dun;
There is neither may nor clover,
And the day and night are one.

Not an hamlet, not a city
Meets our strained and tearless eyes;
In the plain without a pity,
Where the wan grass droops and dies.

We shall wander through the meaning
Of a day and see no light,
For our lichened arms are leaning
On the ends of endless night.

We, the children of Astarte,
Dear abortions of the moon,
In a gay and silent party,
We are riding to you soon.

Burning ramparts, ever burning!
To the flame which never dies
We are yearning, yearning, yearning,
With our gay and tearless eyes.

In the plain without a pity,
(Not an hamlet, not a city)
Where the wan grass droops and dies.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

This Libation, Cupid, Take

This libation, Cupid, take,
With the lilies at thy feet;
Cherish Pierrot for their sake
Send him visions strange and sweet,
While he slumbers at thy feet.
Only love kiss him awake!
Only love kiss him awake!

Ernest Christopher Dowson

To A Lady Asking Foolish Questions

Why am I sorry, Chloe? Because the moon is far:
And who am I to be straitened in a little earthly star?

Because thy face is fair? And what if it had not been,
The fairest face of all is the face I have not seen.

Because the land is cold, and however I scheme and plot,
I cannot find a ferry to the land where I am not.

Because thy lips are red and thy breasts upbraid the snow?
(There is neither white nor red in the pleasance where I go.)

Because thy lips grow pale and thy breasts grow dun and fall?
I go where the wind blows, Chloe, and am not sorry at all.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

To A Lost Love

I seek no more to bridge the gulf that lies
Betwixt our separate ways;
For vainly my heart prays,
Hope droops her head and dies;
I see the sad, tired answer in your eyes.

I did not heed, and yet the stars were clear;
Dreaming that love could mate
Lives grown so separate;--
But at the best, my dear,
I see we should not have been very near.

I knew the end before the end was nigh:
The stars have grown so plain;
Vainly I sigh, in vain
For things that come to some,
But unto you and me will never come.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

To His Mistress

There comes an end to summer,
To spring showers and hoar rime;
His mumming to each mummer
Has somewhere end in time,
And since life ends and laughter,
And leaves fall and tears dry,
Who shall call love immortal,
When all that is must die?

Nay, sweet, let's leave unspoken
The vows the fates gainsay,
For all vows made are broken,
We love but while we may.
Let's kiss when kissing pleases,
And part when kisses pall,
Perchance, this time to-morrow,
We shall not love at all.

You ask my love completest,
As strong next year as now,
The devil take you, sweetest,
Ere I make aught such vow.
Life is a masque that changes,
A fig for constancy!
No love at all were better,
Than love which is not free.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

To One In Bedlam

With delicate, mad hands, behind his sordid bars,
Surely he hath his posies, which they tear and twine;
Those scentless wisps of straw, that miserably line
His strait, caged universe, whereat the dull world stares,

Pedant and pitiful. O, how his rapt gaze wars
With their stupidity! Know they what dreams divine
Lift his long, laughing reveries like enchanted wine,
And make his melancholy germane to the stars'?

O lamentable brother! if those pity thee,
Am I not fain of all thy lone eyes promise me;
Half a fool's kingdom, far from men who sow and reap,
All their days, vanity? Better than mortal flowers,
Thy moon-kissed roses seem: better than love or sleep,
The star-crowned solitude of thine oblivious hours!

Ernest Christopher Dowson

To William Theodore Peters On His Renaissance Cloak

The cherry-coloured velvet of your cloak
Time hath not soiled: its fair embroideries
Gleam as when centuries ago they spoke
To what bright gallant of Her Daintiness,
Whose slender fingers, long since dust and dead,
For love or courtesy embroidered
The cherry-coloured velvet of this cloak.

Ah! cunning flowers of silk and silver thread,
That mock mortality? the broidering dame,
The page they decked, the kings and courts are dead:
Gone the age beautiful; Lorenzo's name,
The Borgia's pride are but an empty sound;
But lustrous still upon their velvet ground,
Time spares these flowers of silk and silver thread.

Gone is that age of pageant and of pride:
Yet don your cloak, and haply it shall seem,
The curtain of old time is set aside;
As through the sadder coloured throng you gleam;
We see once more fair dame and gallant gay,
The glamour and the grace of yesterday:
The elder, brighter age of pomp and pride.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Transition

A little while to walk with thee, dear child;
To lean on thee my weak and weary head;
Then evening comes: the winter sky is wild,
The leafless trees are black, the leaves long dead.

A little while to hold thee and to stand,
By harvest-fields of bending golden corn;
Then the predestined silence, and thine hand,
Lost in the night, long and weary and forlorn.

A little while to love thee, scarcely time
To love thee well enough; then time to part,
To fare through wintry fields alone and climb
The frozen hills, not knowing where thou art.

Short summer-time and then, my heart's desire,
The winter and the darkness: one by one
The roses fall, the pale roses expire
Beneath the slow decadence of the sun.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Vain Hope

Sometimes, to solace my sad heart, I say,
Though late it be, though lily-time be past,
Though all the summer skies be overcast,
Haply I will go down to her, some day,
And cast my rests of life before her feet,
That she may have her will of me, being so sweet
And none gainsay!

So might she look on me with pitying eyes,
And lay calm hands of healing on my head:
'_Because of thy long pains be comforted;
For I, even I, am Love: sad soul, arise!_'
So, for her graciousness, I might at last
Gaze on the very face of Love, and hold Him fast
In no disguise.

Haply, I said, she will take pity on me,
Though late I come, long after lily-time,
With burden of waste days and drifted rhyme:
Her kind, calm eyes, down drooping maidenly,
Shall change, grow soft: there yet is time, meseems,
I said, for solace; though I know these things are dreams
And may not be!

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Vanitas

Beyond the need of weeping,
Beyond the reach of hands,
May she be quietly sleeping,
In what dim nebulous lands?
Ah, she who understands!

The long, long winter weather,
These many years and days,
Since she, and Death, together,
Left me the wearier ways:
And now, these tardy bays!

The crown and victor's token:
How are they worth to-day?
The one word left unspoken,
It were late now to say:
But cast the palm away!

For once, ah once, to meet her,
Drop laurel from tired hands:
Her cypress were the sweeter,
In her oblivious lands:
Haply she understands!

Yet, crossed that weary river,
In some ulterior land,
Or anywhere, or ever,
Will she stretch out a hand?
And will she understand?

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Venite Descendamus

Let be at last; give over words and sighing,
Vainly were all things said:
Better at last to find a place for lying,
Only dead.

Silence were best, with songs and sighing over;
Now be the music mute;
Now let the dead, red leaves of autumn cover
A vain lute.

Silence is best: for ever and for ever,
We will go down and sleep,
Somewhere beyond her ken, where she need never
Come to weep.

Let be at last: colder she grows and colder;
Sleep and the night were best;
Lying at last where we cannot behold her,
We may rest.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Vesperal

Strange grows the river on the sunless evenings!
The river comforts me, grown spectral, vague and dumb:
Long was the day; at last the consoling shadows come:
Sufficient for the day are the day's evil things!

Labour and longing and despair the long day brings;
Patient till evening men watch the sun go west;
Deferred, expected night at last brings sleep and rest:
Sufficient for the day are the day's evil things!

At last the tranquil Angelus of evening rings
Night's curtain down for comfort and oblivion
Of all the vanities observed by the sun:
Sufficient for the day are the day's evil things!

So, some time, when the last of all our evenings
Crowneth memorially the last of all our days,
Not loth to take his poppies man goes down and says,
'Sufficient for the day were the day's evil things!'

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Villanelle

Come hither, child, and rest,
This is the end of day,
Behold the weary West!

Sleep rounds with equal zest
Man's toil and children's play,
Come hither, child, and rest.

My white bird, seek thy nest,
Thy drooping head down lay,
Behold the weary West!

Now eve is manifest
And homeward lies our way,
Behold the weary West!

Tired flower! upon my breast
I would wear thee alway,
Come hither, child, and rest -
Behold the weary West!

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Villanelle Of Acheron

By the pale marge of Acheron,
Me thinks we shall pass restfully,
Beyond the scope of any sun.

There all men hie them one by one,
Far from the stress of earth and sea,
By the pale marge of Acheron.

'Tis well when life and love is done,
'Tis very well at last to be,
Beyond the scope of any sun.

No busy voices there shall stun
Our ears: the stream flows silently
By the pale marge of Acheron.

There is the crown of labour won,
The sleep of immortality,
Beyond the scope of any sun.

Life, of thy gifts I will have none,
My queen is that Persephone,
By the pale marge of Acheron,
Beyond the scope of any sun.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Villanelle Of His Lady's Treasures

I took her dainty eyes, as well
As silken tendrils of her hair:
And so I made a Villanelle!

I took her voice, a silver bell,
As clear as song, as soft as prayer;
I took her dainty eyes as well.

It may be, said I, who can tell,
These things shall be my less despair?
And so I made a Villanelle!

I took her whiteness virginal
And from her cheek two roses rare:
I took her dainty eyes as well.

I said: "It may be possible
Her image from my heart to tear!"
And so I made a Villanelle.

I stole her laugh, most musical:
I wrought it in with artful care;
I took her dainty eyes as well;
And so I made a Villanelle.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Villanelle Of Marguerite's

'A little, _passionately, not at all?_'
She casts the snowy petals on the air:
And what care we how many petals fall!

Nay, wherefore seek the seasons to forestall?
It is but playing, and she will not care,
A little, passionately, not at all!

She would not answer us if we should call
Across the years: her visions are too fair;
And what care we how many petals fall!

She knows us not, nor recks if she enthrall
With voice and eyes and fashion of her hair,
A little, passionately, not at all!

Knee-deep she goes in meadow grasses tall,
Kissed by the daisies that her fingers tear:
And what care we how many petals fall!

We pass and go: but she shall not recall
What men we were, nor all she made us bear:
'_A little, passionately, not at all!_'
And what care we how many petals fall!

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Villanelle Of Sunset

Come hither, child, and rest,
This is the end of day,
Behold the weary West!

Sleep rounds with equal zest
Man's toil and children's play,
Come hither, child, and rest.

My white bird, seek thy nest,
Thy drooping head down lay,
Behold the weary West!

Now eve is manifest
And homeward lies our way,
Behold the weary West!

Tired flower! upon my breast
I would wear thee alway,
Come hither, child, and rest -
Behold the weary West!

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Villanelle Of The Poet's Road

Wine and woman and song,
Three things garnish our way:
Yet is day over long.

Lest we do our youth wrong,
Gather them while we may:
Wine and woman and song.

Three things render us strong,
Vine leaves, kisses and bay:
Yet is day over long.

Unto us they belong,
Us the bitter and gay,
Wine and women and song.

We, as we pass along,
Are sad that they will not stay;
Yet is day over long.

Fruits and flowers among,
What is better than they:
Wine and women and song?
Yet is day over long.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Vitae Summa Brevis Spem Nos Vetat Incohare Longam

They are not long, the weeping and the laughter,
Love and desire and hate:
I think they have no portion in us after
We pass the gate.

They are not long, the days of wine and roses:
Out of a misty dream
Our path emerges for a while, then closes
Within a dream.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

What Is Love?

What is Love?

Is it a folly,

Is it mirth, or melancholy?

Joys above,

Are there many, or not any?

What is Love?

If you please,

A most sweet folly!

Full of mirth and melancholy:

Both of these!

In its sadness worth all gladness,

If you please!

Prithee where,

Goes Love a-hiding?

Is he long in his abiding

Anywhere?

Can you bind him when you find him;

Prithee, where?

With spring days

Love comes and dallies:

Upon the mountains, through the valleys

Lie Love's ways.

Then he leaves you and deceives you

In spring days.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Who Is This Mortal

Who is this mortal
Who ventures to-night
To woo an immortal,
Cold, cold the moon's light
For sleep at this portal,
Bold lover of night.
Fair is the mortal
In soft, silken white,
Who seeks an immortal.
Ah, lover of night,
Be warned at the portal,
And save thee in flight!

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Wisdom

Love wine and beauty and the spring,
While wine is red and spring is here,
And through the almond blossoms ring
The dove-like voices of thy Dear.

Love wine and spring and beauty while
The wine hath flavour and spring masks
Her treachery in so soft a smile
That none may think of toil and tasks.

But when spring goes on hurrying feet,
Look not thy sorrow in the eyes,
And bless thy freedom from thy sweet:
This is the wisdom of the wise.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

You Would Have Understood Me, Had You Waited

You would have understood me, had you waited;
I could have loved you, dear! as well as he:
Had we not been impatient, dear! and fated
Always to disagree.

What is the use of speech? Silence were fitter:
Lest we should still be wishing things unsaid.
Though all the words we ever spake were bitter,
Shall I reproach you dead?

Nay, let this earth, your portion, likewise cover
All the old anger, setting us apart:
Always, in all, in truth was I your lover;
Always, I held your heart.

I have met other women who were tender,
As you were cold, dear! with a grace as rare.
Think you, I turned to them, or made surrender,
I who had found you fair?

Had we been patient, dear! ah, had you waited,
I had fought death for you, better than he:
But from the very first, dear! we were fated
Always to disagree.

Late, late, I come to you, now death discloses
Love that in life was not to be our part:
On your low lying mound between the roses,
Sadly I cast my heart.

I would not waken you: nay! this is fitter;
Death and the darkness give you unto me;
Here we who loved so, were so cold and bitter,
Hardly can disagree.

Ernest Christopher Dowson

Yvonne Of Brittany

In your mother's apple-orchard,
Just a year ago, last spring:
Do you remember, Yvonne!
The dear trees lavishing
Rain of their starry blossoms
To make you a coronet?
Do you ever remember, Yvonne,
As I remember yet?

In your mother's apple-orchard,
When the world was left behind:
You were shy, so shy, Yvonne!
But your eyes were calm and kind.
We spoke of the apple harvest,
When the cider press is set,
And such-like trifles, Yvonne,
That doubtless you forget.

In the still, soft Breton twilight,
We were silent; words were few,
Till your mother came out chiding,
For the grass was bright with dew:
But I know your heart was beating,
Like a fluttered, frightened dove.
Do you ever remember, Yvonne,
That first faint flush of love?

In the fulness of midsummer,
When the apple-bloom was shed,
Oh, brave was your surrender,
Though shy the words you said.
I was glad, so glad, Yvonne!
To have led you home at last;
Do you ever remember, Yvonne,
How swiftly the days passed?

In your mother's apple-orchard
It is grown too dark to stray,
There is none to chide you, Yvonne!

You are over far away.
There is dew on your grave grass, Yvonne!
But your feet it shall not wet:
No, you never remember, Yvonne!
And I shall soon forget.

Ernest Christopher Dowson