

CRITICISM

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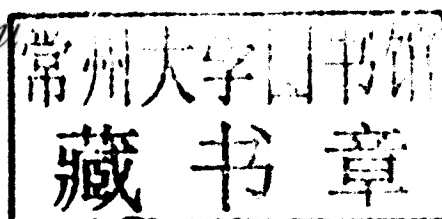
163

Poetry Criticism

*Excerpts from Criticism of the Works
of the Most Significant and Widely
Studied Poets of World Literature*

Volume 163

Lawrence J. Trudeau
Editor



GALE
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Poetry Criticism, Vol. 163

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27500 Drake Rd.

Farmington Hills, MI, 48331-3535

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 81-640179

ISBN-13: 978-1-56995-632-8

ISSN: 1052-4851

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Preface

Poetry Criticism (PC) presents significant criticism of the world's greatest poets and provides supplementary biographical and bibliographical material to guide the interested reader to a greater understanding of the genre and its creators. This series was developed in response to suggestions from librarians serving high school, college, and public library patrons, who had noted a considerable number of requests for critical material on poems and poets. Although major poets and literary movements are covered in such Gale Literary Criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC), *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC), *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC), *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800* (LC), and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism* (CMLC), librarians perceived the need for a series devoted solely to poets and poetry.

Scope of the Series

PC is designed to serve as an introduction to major poets of all eras and nationalities. Since these authors have inspired a great deal of relevant critical material, PC is necessarily selective, and the editors have chosen the most important published criticism to aid readers and students in their research.

Approximately three to six authors, works, or topics are included in each volume. An author's first entry in the series generally presents a historical survey of the critical response to the author's work; subsequent entries will focus upon contemporary criticism about the author or criticism of an important poem, group of poems, or book. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from critics who do not write in English whose criticism has been translated. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Gale's Literary Criticism Series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a PC volume.

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Each PC entry consists of the following elements:

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises poetry collections, book-length poems, and theoretical works by the author about poetry. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. In the case of authors who do not write in English, an English translation of the title is provided as an aid to the reader; the translation is either a published translated title or a free translation provided by the compiler of the entry. In the case of such authors whose works have been translated into English, the **Principal English Translations** focuses primarily on twentieth-century translations, selecting those works most commonly considered the best by critics.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. All individual titles of poems, poetry collections, and theoretical works about poetry by the

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- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Citations conform to recommendations set forth in the Modern Language Association of America's *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (2009).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** describing each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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Glen, Heather. "Blake's Criticism of Moral Thinking in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*." *Interpreting Blake*. Ed. Michael Phillips. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978. 32-69. Rpt. in *Poetry Criticism*. Ed. Michelle Lee. Vol. 63. Detroit: Gale, 2005. 34-51. Print.

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Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Advisory Board xiii

Ernest Dowson 1867-1900	1
<i>English poet, short-story writer, playwright, and novelist</i>	
Letitia Elizabeth Landon 1802-1838	93
<i>English poet, novelist, and critic</i>	
Lorine Niedecker 1903-1970	255
<i>American poet</i>	
Yar Slavutych 1918-2011	303
<i>Ukrainian-born Canadian poet, critic, translator, and editor</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 327

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 449

PC Cumulative Nationality Index 471

PC-163 Title Index 475

Ernest Dowson

1867-1900

(Full name Ernest Christopher Dowson) English poet, short-story writer, playwright, and novelist.

INTRODUCTION

Ernest Dowson, chiefly known as a Decadent poet—part of a group of late-nineteenth-century French and English writers identified with unorthodox content and a general alienation from dominant culture—was associated with both the Rhymers' Club, an influential group that promoted literary experimentation, and the *Yellow Book*, a short-lived literary journal that published some of the most provocative works of the period. After his early death, believed to have been caused in part by alcoholism, he acquired a reputation as the most “decadent” of the Decadents, a literary group that included Aubrey Beardsley and Oscar Wilde, among others. Dowson's poem “Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae” (may be translated as “I Am Not the Man I Was under the Rule of Good Cynara”)—better known as simply “Cynara”—is often referred to as the anthem of the English Decadents, whose practice of aestheticism attracted great attention in the final years of the nineteenth century. In a few carefully crafted stanzas, Dowson's poem captures key qualities associated with Decadence, such as a nostalgia for lost innocence, a feeling of ennui and world-weariness, and a rejection of conventional moral boundaries. The poet's work as a whole also demonstrates the Decadents' belief in “art for art's sake,” privileging evocative language and imagery over description and narration. In reality, however, Dowson seems to have been a hardworking, rather shy man who probably did not start drinking heavily until he developed the same tubercular condition that plagued his parents throughout his childhood. Dowson is now best known for his poetry, but he considered himself a poet second and spent much of his brief career writing stories and sketches, along with two collaborative novels. Only a small number of his prose works has garnered critical regard, but respect for his skill as a poet has grown steadily since the 1960s.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Dowson was born on 2 August 1867 in Lee, a township in southeastern England. His father, Alfred Dowson, had inherited a London property that was leased out as a dry-dock facility, bringing in sufficient money to provide his family with a life of leisure and cultural activity. Alfred had an interest in literature and developed social relations

ships with such well-known figures as Robert Browning, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Robert Louis Stevenson. Both he and his wife, Annie, suffered from tuberculosis, and the family often traveled abroad in search of more beneficial conditions. Dowson seems to have been educated almost entirely by his father, acquiring sufficient academic preparation to enter Queen's College, Oxford, in 1886. Already well versed in French, he continued his study of Continental literature and began reading classical texts. He left Oxford after five semesters, in part because he found the university curriculum limiting and in part because of a change in his family's fortunes. Alfred—in his pursuit of health, travel, and cultural interests—had neglected to modernize and maintain the dock that provided his family's income, and in 1888, father and son were forced to take over the day-to-day management of the business. Dowson continued to work at the dock until 1894, when his father died of a presumed drug overdose. His mother, Annie, hanged herself just a few months later. As a result of legal complications involving the estate, Dowson became not only an orphan but also an impoverished one. He had also begun to suffer from tubercular attacks, and after 1895, he lived mainly in France.

By the time of his father's death, however, Dowson had already accomplished a great deal as a writer. Upon leaving Oxford, he had completed thirty poems, carefully preserved in a notebook to which he would continue to add throughout his life. Two of these poems had appeared in print, and his first short story was published in 1888, followed by another in 1890. He was steadily making the acquaintance of other writers and artists, and with these friends he spent most evenings dining out, attending the theater, or talking in cafés. At one frequently visited restaurant, the Poland, he began a friendship with the owner's young daughter, Adelaide Foltinowicz. Only twelve years old at the time, Adelaide—whom Dowson usually referred to as “Missie”—embodied his ideal of virginal innocence, and his conflicted fascination with her became almost obsessive. It also influenced his decision to convert to Roman Catholicism in 1891. “Cynara” was written during this period, and Dowson began to expand his circle of literary friendships through participation in the Rhymers' Club. There he met Wilde, William Butler Yeats, and Richard Le Gallienne, as well as several of the editors and publishers who were responsible for the publication of most of his work during the following decade. Dowson was active in producing the group's two anthologies, published in 1892 and 1894, and his own works were well received by members of the club and by readers in general. *Dilemmas*, a collection of his

short fiction, appeared in 1895, followed by the poetry collection *Verses* in 1896. That same year, the *Savoy*, a short-lived magazine for the arts, published what is perhaps his best short story, "The Dying of Francis Donne." His play, *The Pierrot of the Minute*, was published in 1897, although it was written several years earlier. The last volume Dowson prepared for publication, *Decorations* (1899), contained five previously unpublished prose poems. By that time, his health was failing rapidly, and, perhaps as a result of depression, he fell out of touch with most of his friends. In his last years, he supported himself by translating the works of Émile Zola, Voltaire, and others. Dowson died on 23 February 1900, having spent the last few weeks of his life in the care of a sympathetic acquaintance. Forty unpublished poems were found in Dowson's notebook after his death, all of them written before 1894.

MAJOR POETIC WORKS

In all, Dowson wrote 114 poems. Almost a fifth of them have titles in Latin, which were seemingly intended to acknowledge inspirations drawn from classical literature. Dowson did not attempt to emulate these classical works, however, and instead drew his primary influence from the Symbolist poets and Impressionist painters of France. His attraction to French poetry is reflected in his experimentation with such forms as the villanelle and the rondeau. Despite the difficulty of adapting these specialized forms from the French language into English, Dowson often succeeded in his efforts.

Like other poets who regarded themselves as part of the Decadent movement, Dowson was interested in creating poetry that would produce, through language, the same aesthetic effect produced by other means in music and in visual art. Although most of his fellow poets failed to come up with an effective strategy, Dowson was able to employ, as Stephanie Kuduk Weiner (2006) observed, sights and sounds as "tools for organizing poems that resist representing a world outside the poem." This strategy, Weiner continued, was central "in his attempt to create a 'pure' and purely aesthetic poetry whose imagery and sounds would be comparable in their autonomy and anti-representational potential to paint or notes of music." The painstaking craftsmanship required for this project is evident in Dowson's repeated revisions, which he sometimes continued even in the proofing stage, after the type was set. Frequently, his changes involved moving or removing punctuation in order to let the poem flow more freely and perhaps to lessen even further any associations with narration or description. Dowson biographer Jad Adams (2000; see Further Reading) reported that Dowson composed "Cynara" in a tavern, writing with the stub of a pencil and with a glass of absinthe in front of him. And yet, Adams noted, the "many variations in different versions of 'Cynara' which he sent to his friends, show that he worked the verse over and again, changing individual words and punctuation."

Notwithstanding his exploration of varied forms and his attention to the details of poetic compositions, Dowson limited his themes to a narrow range. His thematic spectrum is substantially the same for both poetry and prose, encompassing tropes of lost or unrequited love, the elevation of art over ordinary life, the inevitable corruption of original purity, and the deep longing for a true faith. Most of these notes are sounded in "Cynara," which establishes with poetic economy an impression that the poet/subject is haunted by memories of his perfect love object, Cynara, even while he is debauching himself with a prostitute. The power of that remembered love, it seems, cannot be overcome by other sorts of experience, despite the poet's call for "madder music" and "stronger wine." In a recurring refrain, the poet insists both ironically and poignantly that he has been faithful to that lost perfection, at least in his own way—or perhaps in the only way possible. The poem, whose full Latin title is taken from the work of the Roman poet Propertius and means "I am not the man I was under the rule of good Cynara," contains the phrase "gone with the wind," now firmly entrenched in popular culture. Another of Dowson's best-known poems, "Vitae summa brevis spem nos vetat incohare longam" (may be translated as "The Short Sum of Life Forbids Us to Commence Long Hopes"), which is titled after a quote from the Roman poet Horace, provided the world with the memorable line "[t]hey are not long, the days of wine and roses."

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Joseph H. Gardner (1991) observed, "Once all the embroidery and ornamentation surrounding the Dowson myth have been cleared away, the fact emerges that the man wrote lyric poems of unusual delicacy, grace, and clarity that, on the whole, lack the overheated and overloaded sensuality—though not the languor and *ennui*—characteristically associated with the nineties." Karen Alkalay-Gut (1994) pointed out that it "has always been to the detriment of an understanding of Ernest Dowson's poetry that it is linked with the rather dreamy and decadent life conceived by his critics and followers." The image of Dowson as an embodiment of the Decadent movement was promoted early on, particularly by his friend Arthur Symonds, whose preface to a 1905 edition of Dowson's collected poems paints Dowson as a habitual bohemian. For half a century, the melodramatic mischaracterization of his life obscured the fact that, as Alkalay-Gut observed, Dowson's poetry is "carefully grounded in literature, philosophy, dialogues and commentary on other poets and writers." There is certainly some truth in the portrait of Dowson as pensive and depressed, but his early death did not result simply from riotous living or self-destructive compulsions, as widely assumed, and he does not seem to have been a pedophile or a drug addict. On the contrary, his correspondence, published in 1967, reveals a man serious about his writing and responsible to his family obligations.

Dowson's best critics, Weiner contended, are those who have "taken seriously his formalist aestheticism and shown its relation not simply to fin-de-siècle themes of decadence and ennui but to formal and linguistic concerns in nineteenth-century literature and culture more broadly." The rehabilitation of Dowson's reputation was already underway in the 1960s, as seen in Jan B. Gordon's 1967 study of his depiction of various strategies to preserve or recover a state of innocence, as well as in Russell M. Goldfarb's 1969 refutation (see Further Reading) of the popular characterizations that overshadowed Dowson's literary accomplishments. In a similar vein, Rowena Fowler (1973) addressed critical accusations that Dowson had little knowledge of the classics and used classical titles and allusions pretentiously rather than substantively. Fowler's analysis places Dowson's use of classical material in the broader context of his approach to literary creation. Other significant contributions to Dowson studies in the later twentieth century include Gardner's examination of Dowson's poetry in the context of the pastoral tradition and Michael J. O'Neal's 1979 structural analysis of Dowson's syntactic strategies. The reassessment of Dowson has continued in the twenty-first century, as reflected by Adams's thorough biography and by such focused inquiries as Weiner's exploration of Dowson's effort to separate poetry from the act of observation.

Cynthia Giles

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Poetry

Verses. London: Smithers, 1896.

Decorations: In Verse and Prose. London: Smithers, 1899.

The Poems of Ernest Dowson. Portland: Mosher, 1902.

**The Poems of Ernest Dowson*. Ed. Arthur Symons. London: Lane, 1905.

Cynara: A Little Book of Verse. Portland: Mosher, 1907.

Complete Poems of Ernest Dowson. New York: Medusa Head, 1928.

The Poetical Works of Ernest Christopher Dowson. Ed. Desmond Flower. London: Lane/Cassell, 1934. Pub. as *The Poetry of Ernest Dowson*. Ed. Flower. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1967.

The Poems of Ernest Dowson. Ed. Mark Longaker. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1962.

Collected Poems. Ed. R. K. R. Thornton and Caroline Dowson. Birmingham: Birmingham UP, 2003.

Other Major Works

A Comedy of Masks. With Arthur Moore. 3 vols. London: Heinemann, 1893. (Novel)

Majesty. Trans. Ernest Dowson and A. Teixeira de Mattos from *Majesteit*, by Louis Couperus. London: Unwin, 1894. (Novel)

La terre [may be translated as *The Earth*]. By Émile Zola. Trans. Ernest Dowson. London: Lutetian Soc., 1894. (Novel)

Dilemmas: Stories and Studies in Sentiment. London: Mathews, 1895. (Short stories)

The History of Modern Painting. Trans. Ernest Dowson, George A. Greene, and Arthur C. Hillier from *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX Jahrhundert*, by Richard Muther. 3 vols. London: Henry, 1895-96. (History)

La fille aux yeux d'or [may be translated as *The Girl with the Golden Eyes*]. By Honoré de Balzac. Trans. Ernest Dowson. London: Smithers, 1896. (Novella)

The Pierrot of the Minute: A Dramatic Phantasy in One Act. London: Smithers, 1897. (Play)

Les liaisons dangereuses [may be translated as *Dangerous Liaisons*]. By Pierre Choderlos de Laclos. Trans. Ernest Dowson. London: Privately printed, 1898. (Novel)

Adrian Rome. With Moore. London: Methuen, 1899. (Novel)

Memoirs of Cardinal Dubois. Trans. Ernest Dowson from *Mémoires du Cardinal Dubois*, by Paul Lacroix. 2 vols. London: Smithers, 1899. (Memoir)

La pucelle [may be translated as *The Maid*]. Trans. Ernest Dowson from *La pucelle d'Orléans*, by Voltaire. 2 vols. London: Lutetian Soc., 1899. (Poetry)

The Confidantes of a King: The Mistresses of Louis XV. Trans. Ernest Dowson from *Les maîtresses de Louis XV*, by Edmond de Goncourt and Jules de Goncourt. 2 vols. London: Foulis, 1907. (Biographies)

†*Studies in Sentiment*. Portland: Mosher, 1915. (Short stories)

The Poems and Prose of Ernest Dowson. Ed. Symons. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1919. (Poetry and prose)

The Stories of Ernest Dowson. Ed. Longaker. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1947. (Short stories)

The Letters of Ernest Dowson. Ed. Flower and Henry Maas. London: Cassell, 1967. (Letters)

New Letters from Ernest Dowson. Ed. Flower. Andoverford: Whittington, 1984. (Letters)

Collected Shorter Fiction. Ed. Monica Borg and Thornton. Birmingham: Birmingham UP, 2003. (Short stories)

*Includes the poems "Vitae summa brevis spem nos vetat incohare longam" [may be translated as "The Short Sum of Life Forbids Us to Commence Long Hopes"] and "Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae" [may be translated as "I Am Not the Man I Was under the Rule of Good Cynara"], which is commonly referred to as "Cynara."

†Includes the short story "The Dying of Francis Donne," first published in the *Savoy* in August 1896.

CRITICISM

Victor Plarr (essay date 1914)

SOURCE: Plarr, Victor. "Reminiscences," "Dowson the Docker," and "Marginalia." *Ernest Dowson, 1888-1897: Reminiscences, Unpublished Letters and Marginalia*. New York: Gomme, 1914. 11-30; 31-41; 42-51. Print.

[In the following essays, Plarr first discusses his personal encounter with Dowson before offering an account of the poet's life. He then examines Dowson's beginnings working on a dock, contending that Dowson's friend and fellow poet Arthur Symonds "need not have pitied him for being a docker in those early artless days," for the poet "appreciated the ancestral trade half humorously." Plarr also considers what the poet's notes in his personal books reveal about Dowson's character and thought process.]

REMINISCENCES

It was early in the year 1888 that my old friend, Mr Charles Sayle, that great introducer, first said to me: "There's a man whom you ought to know, a young poet just down from college, a man exactly like J."—naming a well-known writer; "only, if possible, more so!"

Cæsar and Pompey were very much alike, in the opinion of the black man, especially Pompey. And this was the case with Mr J. and Ernest Dowson, the latter being the more alike—that is, the more representative of the type. So possessed was I with this parallelism that, like an eminent bungling barrister in a law case full of names, who addresses the defendant by the patronymic of his dupe, I constantly transposed their surnames, and for years confused and puzzled Ernest Dowson by addressing him as J. I made somewhat the same mistake again only yesterday.

We met in Mr Sayle's rooms, those quaint picturesque rooms which were to be found in Gray's Inn years ago, and have doubtless not been obliterated in that ancient place.

We were friends at once. The child that was in both of us was our bond. A man may not boast or be too egotistic: do not, therefore, accuse me, courteous reader, of writing too much of myself or of indulging in self-glorification when I

say that I rejoice for evermore at the thought that the otherwise deterrent childish factor within me has at different times opened to me the gateways of the spirit.

We launched at once upon some tack of conversation about our disabilities. Peter Pan had not been heard of, but we adumbrated him.

"Shall you ever feel old?"

"No; I am static—about four years of age."

"Like Victor Hugo at the age of eighty!"

"It's a great drawback in applying for appointments. One must study the stodgy!"

"Yes; fancy a creature of four among old dry gentlemen with long black legs, applying for a secretaryship to a gas-works."

"It's a nightmare. I often have them. I find myself put into parlous positions, and trying in my dream to say—"The cumulative ratiocinations of this objective evidence are calculated to divert the attention of the party of immutability in inverse proportion to the corroborative dogmatism of the prior deponent. The issue, indeed, could not be more luminously stated.' I'm only four years old, and it's rather a strain."

"Yes, yes! When I transact serious business—and I do all day—I view myself from the outside as something strange and awful. They refer to me in reports without a blush as 'our plodding friend, Mr ——.' Ye gods, I haven't the pleasure of the gentleman's acquaintance. Were it possible to talk as you do in nightmares one would be very eminent in a year's time. One would be a big barrister or in Parliament."

"No, one would write for *The Times* and have a masterly grasp—of bimetallism, say. D'you know that at the age of seventeen, in the Sixth Form of a Public School, I put important leading articles aside as I should put Sanscrit or classical German aside? Couldn't understand a sentence!"

"Numbers of people, I fancy, regard poetry in the same light all their lives."

We cited old forgotten authors, to whom one dares not now refer without a blush, or to whom one adverts desperately by way of paradox, the kind of paradox in which the elderly are indulged because they are known to have suffered some disappointments.

Shall I say that, at that early date in our acquaintance, Loti was one of these forgotten? Dowson first spoke of Loti, and I have a dim inkling of a recollection that he spoke also of Plato, in at least one of whose immortal dialogues he rejoiced and had probably been "ploughed" during his mysterious sojourn at Queen's College, Oxford.

We saw much of one another from this time forward. He was singularly fresh, young, eager, sympathetic, his charming face unscathed by any serious sorrows or dissipations.

There followed, in his career, a strange period of rowdiness—I can use no other word—of the undergraduate type—that is to say, it was quaint and boyish.

I occupied the most uncomfortable rooms in the world in Great Russell Street, and often, late at night, Dowson crept into the house and begged a bed. I was so selfish as to suggest a sofa, and on a horrible horsehair sofa, or on the floor, in a blatant parlour, he often slept, under such blankets as could be found. He seems to have kept this custom up, for Mr Edgar Jepson, in an admirable account of him, published in *The Academy* in 1906, says that Ernest Dowson often slept in his arm-chair. It was an unwise custom at best, but we did not suspect the frailty of his health.

Ordinarily a Rechabite in those days, I had nothing to offer him but water at an hour after midnight. He drank his tumbler of water, and remarked good-humouredly: "This reminds me of Milton," who always drank a glass of water after supper.

A legend has arisen of an inebriate Ernest Dowson. It has been generated chiefly in the two closely allied consciences of America and of British Nonconformity. Personally, in eight years or so, I remember only a trifling aberration from the path of temperance, when he leant, smiling meditatively, against a lamp-post, exactly where the Irving statue now stands. He manifestly required support.

A lady, who had been mercifully blind to his condition, was being shown into a cab, and I shall never forget—I see the scene now vividly—how he leapt from his dream—he had been standing storklike, one leg crossed over the other—and presented the lady, or the cabby, with her fare. It was done in a flash of lightning, with a dreamy delicacy quite incomparable. She is dead of consumption, poor thing, so this trifling reminiscence hurts no one! He took out a florin and I wondered at the time that he had so much money in his pocket. Everybody is, in these pallid days, called "drunk" if he is ever so little elated, but when I was a small boy, in St Andrews in Fifeshire, only those were called drunk who lay in the gutter on their backs. Surely some middle way of speech might be discovered between these two extremes.

Sometimes, with other merry revellers, he arrived in the street outside my rooms, and bawled my name, in chorus with his friends, for many minutes. The long and dreary street must have become aware of my existence, and, in my most uncomfortable bed, I reflected at the time that never yet had an ancient patronymic figured in such wise!

These friends—let the Muse of History descend and unbend—called themselves "Bingers," and to "binge" was to behave and to potate most eccentrically. The Benson Company are said still to understand the word.

Those were scapegrace days—and some amusing traditions could be related concerning them—but, Lord! as Mr Pepys would have said, they were nothing more. At all times they were far, very far, from the depth of lurid dissipation that is being allowed to cover the poet's good fame, unless it be rescued betimes.

And Mr Jepson's kindly apology for his glass of absinthe before dinner was not really necessary in 1906, seeing that Dowson was an amateur of many good plebeian French customs, among which the *appétitif*—often consisting of absinthe—is one. Englishmen dislike this poison, which they liken to paregoric, a mysterious mixture not known to Continentals, or to Ernest Dowson.

His short career, indeed, may be said to divide itself into three periods, of which the second alone really concerns us, for it is the finest. In the first period, which lasted from 1888, or a little earlier, to 1891 or thereabouts, the poet was after all only in his green salad days, just as any other normal youth might be. Nor would it be necessary to allude to them save for the emergence of a miracle—the miracle of poetry. For all the while that Ernest Dowson ran foolishly and noisily about London, sleeping on sofas, consorting with the last of the Bob Sawyers, and proving on the whole agreeably unwise, his muse was fluttering into life.

Suddenly, we were all, as it were, startled by a perfect poem from his pen. We had not, so to speak, expected it of the pleasant youth, who played billiards punctually at six o'clock every evening and smoked rather vile Vevey cigars!

The poets have often presented this paradox. Thus the young Shakespeare meditated "Venus and Adonis" among the deer-stealers, and Byron, the dandy, wooed the muse in the intervals of the deals at Almack's. It is a truism to say that poetry will out even in the most adverse circumstances, and perhaps because of them. How many of our bards, for instance, have been tempered after passing through the purifying fires of an English public school, where to be a poet is to rank vilely with pale young martyrs who say their prayers, "swots" who conscientiously do their lessons, Radicals, fat-eaters, and other pariahs hateful to the soul of Boy!

Dowson had escaped the public school Hinnomfires, and at Oxford, where poetry is an honoured tradition, he can surely not have suffered, but his early associations in London were in piquant contrast to his genius. Most of his friends cannot have dreamt that he was a poet at all.

Perhaps this is as it should be. What chance, after all, had young M. de Lamartine, whose adoring family helped him to shut himself up in his bedroom and to fast while composing poetry in his teens? I am French enough by race, and old-fashioned enough, to adore the orthodox romantics, but often, in reading them, I wonder whether they would have survived the kicks, and almost the obloquy,

which must, at some time or other, and in varying degrees, have been the portion of the schoolboy Shelleys, Cloughs, Matthew Arnolds, and Lionel Johnsons.

And here is yet another paradox. Whence have we the gift of poetry in any generation? From whom in the past does this divine essence distil? What accounts for that Latin Ernest Dowson, that belated counterpart of Catullus, Propertius and the rest.

Many of us knew Ernest Dowson's father, a remarkable man, a wit, the friend of half the interesting artists and men of letters of his generation, the relative of Browning's! "Waring," one holding the full and true tradition of Elizabeth Barrett Browning through the Barretts, and, through his friendship with Severn, of John Keats. But this elder Mr Dowson did not account for a Catullus, nor did Ernest Dowson's mother, accomplished and intellectual as that lady was.

It is true that the poet was wont to shake his head gloomily over a print or pencil sketch of an ancestor engaged in theatricals, on a queer stage with spindling Corinthian columns, in the period of George IV.! But at most that ancestor can only have accounted for the Vevey cigars and the *vie de Bohème*. Whence—from what older stock—came "**Amor Umbratilis**," and "**Supreme Unction**," and that glorious poem which bursts forth in one of these letters?

"**Amor Umbratilis**," was one of the first poems that attracted much attention. It was published, if I remember rightly, by Mr Herbert Home in *The Century Guild Hobby Horse* together with a batch of the poet's other most noteworthy verses. The MS. of it, in pencil, lies before me now, inscribed on the back of a fierce letter referring to the poet's Oxford bills, which, he told me, he had agreed to pay by degrees. "You have not returned this promissory note as arranged—please do so at once." And Ernest Dowson has immortalised this gruffness with one of the loveliest elegies in the language! One wonders if he chose his scrap of paper of set purpose. The solicitor's date on it is October 7, 1890. He sent me, and I believe others of his friends, numbers of MS. poems. I have thirteen of his best—all, in fact, except the now famous "**Cynara**." One is written on the back of a letter from a stockbroker: "I have advised you a good many times to join the 'S—— Syndicate,' and you might have got the shares at one pound each, but you have let the chance slip through your fingers and the price is now three pounds."

To think what a chance our poet missed! The letters are reproving and rather uncivil, but a law of libel, designed in a democratic age to protect queer fish from being caught, prevents me from printing the writers' names. Perhaps, however, I ought to do so in the interests of historic truth and to advertise their respective firms.

The poet told me that he adored gambling, but I have no evidence that he gambled. He loved excitement, as all true artists do, and gambling is one of the attainable excite-

ments. "*Il faut être toujours un peu ivre*," he was fond of quoting from Baudelaire, and he frequently complained that a long bout of early to bed and early to rise, combined with reasonable diet, etc., knocked him up, as Lord Byron would have said, damnably.

I am hastening to the poet's second period, the worthiest one, but the first detains me at every turn. We smiled at him then. He was a dear, queer fellow! He said to me once that he rather disliked "humour," and yet he was half consciously humorous always. His education before the Oxford period, itself a "veiled period," to quote Borrow's phrase, was wrapped in mystery. His childhood, he tells us, in a marginal note—I shall refer to these later—was pagan. "All these fluctuations and agonies of a hypersensitive, morbid childhood with Hebraic traditions are to [me] incomprehensible," he writes. "My childhood was pagan." As to natural religion, which belongs to childhood, it was "a phase, which at no time of my life have I ever undergone or understood."

A truly charming pastel of his little wistful ideal face at the age of four, by the late W. G. Wills, hung over the mantelpiece of his family's drawing-room in their house at Forest Row in 1888-1890. The young expression was unforgettable, and this is perhaps the only portrait of Ernest Dowson that remains, or has been extant, besides Mr William Rothenstein's sketch and the reproduction of a photograph of him in a Queen's College "blazer," prefixed to his "**Collected Poems**." At the time of writing this Dr Greene tells me that he once asked Ernest Dowson to lunch to meet the famous Mr Sargent, but the painter was apparently unimpressed by his possible sitter.

He received no regular education, unless we count his one half-mythic year at college. He had learnt Latin from an Italian priest in a mountain village in Italy—possibly Senta, a place beloved by him. At least this is the tradition as it came to me from him. In many ways he was surprisingly and refreshingly ignorant. Quite gravely once he averred to me that he supposed the Red Indians in the United States greatly outnumbered the white men, and that he hoped the natives in their war-paint would soon march on New York, destroy it, and thus break the back of transatlantic civilisation! Yet he was the friend of some charming Americans, and perhaps his truest admirers are in the States.

Of modern science, like most of his literary generation, he knew nothing at all, nor of history, and he commented wonderingly upon another's habit of always reading it. He envied a poet whose objective vignettes of periods and peoples struck him as a tapestry. "It is always that power of weaving tapestries that I envy and admire!"

I am setting down my recollections of him at random, and before I forget them, and there is no need to be systematic in a labour of love. In English politics he was vague. The still mighty voice of Gladstone appealed to him not at all. He disregarded the Irish Question—all questions of the