

*Non Sum Qualis Eram Bonae Sub Regno Cynarae*¹

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 grey:
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 Dowson²

¹ "I am not as I was under the reign of the kind Cynara." The quotation is a line from Horace.

² Living for a while in the East End of London where his father owned a dry dock, Ernest Dowson fell in love with the daughter of a restaurant keeper. It was a platonic love, and the girl understood neither Dowson's reticent idealism nor the poem he wrote to her. This classic of sentimental decadence was wasted on Dowson's "Cynarae"; she ran off and married one of her father's waiters. - (*Men and Women: The Poetry of Love*: American Heritage Press 1970)