

From *Verses* (1896)

ERNEST DOWSON

"In Preface: For Adelaide"

To you, who are my verses, as on some very future day, if you ever care to read them, you will understand, would it not be somewhat trivial to dedicate any one verse, as I may do, in all humility, to my friends? Trivial, too, perhaps, only to name you even here? Trivial, presumptuous? For I need not write your name for you at least to know that this and all my work is made for you in the first place, and I need not to be reminded by my critics that I have no silver tongue such as were fit to praise you. So for once you shall go indedicate, if not quite anonymous; and I will only commend my little book to you in sentences far beyond my poor compass which will help you perhaps to be kind to it:

"Votre personne, vos moindres mouvements me semblaient avoir dans le monde une importance extra-humaine. Mon coeur comme de la poussière se soulevait derrière vos pas. Vous me faisiez l'effet d'un clair-de-lune par une nuit d'été, quand tout est parfums, ombres douces, blancheurs, infini; et les délices de la chair et de l'âme étaient contenues pour moi dans votre nom que je me répétais en tachant de le baiser sur mes lèvres.

"Quelqufois vos paroles me reviennent comme un écho lointain, comme le son d'une cloche apporté par le vent; et il me semble que vous êtes là quand je lis des passages de l'amour dans les livres. . . . Tout ce qu'on y blâme d'exagéré, vous me l'avez fait ressentir."

PONT-AVEN, FINISTÈRE, 1896.

[The passage quoted in French above is from *L'Education Sentimentale* by Gustave Flaubert, one of Dowson's favorite authors. In it the hero Frédéric addresses the woman he has always loved but who has never been his lover. They have now both grown old, and he is shocked to see that her hair has grown white. In a rare moment of self-knowledge, Frédéric realizes that perhaps all along he has been more in love with love itself, and it would not be right for him to make love to her now, as he fears feeling some repulsion and the tarnishing of his ideal. The passage Dowson quotes is when the two face each other for the last time and Frédéric says the following [here

translated] as a valediction to their love,

“Your person, your least movements, seemed to me to have an extra-human importance in the world. My heart of dust raised behind your steps. You were the clair-de-lune of one summer night when all is perfume, shade, soft, whitenesses, infinite; and the delicateness of the flesh and the heart were contained for me in your name, which I repeat to myself by staining kisses on my lips. Sometimes your words return to me as a remote echo, like the sound of a bell brought by the wind; and it seems to me that you are here when I read passages of th love in the books . . . All at once, you ‘made me feel.’”]