

## *The Text:*

### Tennyson`s Tithonus

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,  
The vapours weep their burthen to the ground,  
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,  
And after many a summer dies the swan.  
Me only cruel immortality  
Consumes; I wither slowly in thine arms,  
Here at the quiet limit of the world,  
A white-hair'd shadow roaming like a dream  
The ever-silent spaces of the East,  
Far-folded mists, and gleaming halls of morn.

Alas! for this gray shadow, once a man—  
So glorious in his beauty and thy choice,  
Who madest him thy chosen, that he seem'd  
To his great heart none other than a God!  
I ask'd thee, "Give me immortality."  
Then didst thou grant mine asking with a smile,  
Like wealthy men who care not how they give.  
But thy strong Hours indignant work'd their wills,

And beat me down and marr'd and wasted me,  
And tho' they could not end me, left me maim'd  
To dwell in presence of immortal youth,  
Immortal age beside immortal youth,  
And all I was in ashes. Can thy love  
Thy beauty, make amends, tho' even now,  
Close over us, the silver star, thy guide,  
Shines in those tremulous eyes that fill with tears  
To hear me? Let me go: take back thy gift:  
Why should a man desire in any way  
To vary from the kindly race of men,  
Or pass beyond the goal of ordinance  
Where all should pause, as is most meet for all?

A soft air fans the cloud apart; there comes  
A glimpse of that dark world where I was born.  
Once more the old mysterious glimmer steals  
From any pure brows, and from thy shoulders pure,  
And bosom beating with a heart renew'd.  
Thy cheek begins to redden thro' the gloom,  
Thy sweet eyes brighten slowly close to mine,  
Ere yet they blind the stars, and the wild team

Which love thee, yearning for thy yoke, arise,  
And shake the darkness from their loosen'd manes,  
And beat the twilight into flakes of fire.

Lo! ever thus thou growest beautiful  
In silence, then before thine answer given  
Departest, and thy tears are on my cheek.

Why wilt thou ever scare me with thy tears,  
And make me tremble lest a saying learnt,  
In days far-off, on that dark earth, be true?  
“The Gods themselves cannot recall their gifts.”

Ay me! ay me! with what another heart  
In days far-off, and with what other eyes  
I used to watch (if I be he that watch'd)  
The lucid outline forming round thee; saw  
The dim curls kindle into sunny rings;  
Changed with thy mystic change, and felt my blood  
Glow with the glow that slowly crimson'd all  
Thy presence and thy portals, while I lay,  
Mouth, forehead, eyelids, growing dewy-warm  
With kisses balmier than half-opening buds  
Of April, and could hear the lips that kiss'd

Whispering I knew not what of wild and sweet,  
Like that strange song I heard Apollo sing,  
While Ilion like a mist rose into towers.

Yet hold me not for ever in thine East;  
How can my nature longer mix with thine?  
Coldly thy rosy shadows bathe me, cold  
Are all thy lights, and cold my wrinkled feet  
Upon thy glimmering thresholds, when the steam  
Floats up from those dim fields about the homes  
Of happy men that have the power to die,  
And grassy barrows of the happier dead.  
Release me, and restore me to the ground;  
Thou seest all things, thou wilt see my grave:  
Thou wilt renew thy beauty morn by morn;  
I earth in earth forget these empty courts,  
And thee returning on thy silver wheels

### **Form**

This poem is a dramatic monologue: the entire text is spoken by a single character whose words reveal his identity. The lines take the form of

blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter). The poem as a whole falls into seven paragraph-like sections of varying length, each of which forms a thematic unit unto itself.

### **The myth**

Tennyson exploits the myth of Tithonus who is a figure from Greek mythology. Tennyson selects this man to be the narrator of his poem. Tithonus is the brother of king Troy who falls in love with the goddess of dawn, Aurora. Out of deep love, she asks Zeus to grant him everlasting immortality but without everlasting youth. From this point the suffer begins. How he can endure the daily refreshment of his lover with daily aging of him. Tithonus tastes the bitterness of the frailty of old age. He pleads his lover to let him die, but she doesn't have the ability to restore her gift. Her response is understood from her tears.

### **Tennyson's message:**

Man should not be ambitious to go beyond the rule of nature. Death and life are normal cycles of nature. Immortality without youth can be torture. Death sometime can contain relief.

### **Suggested Questions**

1-Comment on the downward movement in the poem.

2-comment on the Victorian way of using myth.

2-trace any reference to Arthur Hallam in the poem.

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