

1827

TAMERLANE

Edgar Allan Poe

Poe, Edgar Allan (1809-49) - American poet, short-story writer, and critic who is best known for his tales of ratiocination, his fantastical horror stories, and his genre-founding detective stories. Poe, whose cloudy personal life is a virtual legend, considered himself primarily a poet. Tamerlane (1827) - One of Poe's poems. Opening lines: Kind solace in a dying hour! / Such, father, is not (now) my theme TAMERLANE

Tamerlane

Kind solace in a dying hour!

Such, father, is not (now) my theme I will not madly deem that power Of Earth
may shrive me of the sin Unearthly pride hath revell'd in I have no time to dote
or dream: You call it hope- that fire of fire!

It is but agony of desire: If I can hope- Oh God! I can Its fount is holier- more
divine I would not call thee fool, old man, But such is not a gift of thine.

Know thou the secret of a spirit Bow'd from its wild pride into shame.

O yearning heart! I did inherit Thy withering portion with the fame, The searing
glory which hath shone Amid the jewels of my throne, Halo of Hell! and with a
pain Not Hell shall make me fear again O craving heart, for the lost flowers And
sunshine of my summer hours!

The undying voice of that dead time, With its interminable chime, Rings, in the
spirit of a spell, Upon thy emptiness- a knell.

I have not always been as now: The fever'd diadem on my brow I claim'd and
won usurpingly Hath not the same fierce heirdom given Rome to the Caesar- this
to me? The heritage of a kingly mind, And a proud spirit which hath striven
Triumphantly with human kind.

On mountain soil I first drew life: The mists of the Taglay have shed Nightly
their dews upon my head, And, I believe, the winged strife And tumult of the
headlong air Have nestled in my very hair.

So late from Heaven- that dew- it fell (Mid dreams of an unholy night) Upon me
with the touch of Hell, While the red flashing of the light From clouds that hung,
like banners, o'er, Appeared to my half-closing eye The pageantry of monarchy,
And the deep trumpet-thunder's roar Came hurriedly upon me, telling Of
human battle, where my voice, My own voice, silly child!- was swelling (O! how
my spirit would rejoice, And leap within me at the cry) The battle-cry of Victory!

The rain came down upon my head Unshelter'd- and the heavy wind Rendered
me mad and deaf and blind.

It was but man, I thought, who shed Laurels upon me: and the rush The torrent
of the chilly air Gurgled within my ear the crush Of empires- with the captive's
prayer The hum of suitors- and the tone Of flattery 'round a sovereign's throne.

My passions, from that hapless hour, Usurp'd a tyranny which men Have
deem'd, since I have reach'd to power, My innate nature- be it so: But father,
there liv'd one who, then, Then- in my boyhood- when their fire Burn'd with a
still intenser glow, (For passion must, with youth, expire) E'en then who knew
this iron heart In woman's weakness had a part.

I have no words- alas!- to tell The loveliness of loving well!

Nor would I now attempt to trace The more than beauty of a face Whose lineaments, upon my mind, Are- shadows on th' unstable wind: Thus I remember having dwelt Some page of early lore upon, With loitering eye, till I have felt The letters- with their meaning- melt To fantasies- with none.

O, she was worthy of all love!

Love- as in infancy was mine'Twas such as angel minds above Might envy; her young heart the shrine On which my every hope and thought Were incense- then a goodly gift, For they were childish and uprightPure- as her young example taught: Why did I leave it, and, adrift, Trust to the fire within, for light?

We grew in age- and love- together, Roaming the forest, and the wild; My breast her shield in wintry weather And when the friendly sunshine smil'd, And she would mark the opening skies, I saw no Heaven- but in her eyes.

Young Love's first lesson is- the heart: For 'mid that sunshine, and those smiles, When, from our little cares apart, And laughing at her girlish wiles, I'd throw me on her throbbing breast, And pour my spirit out in tearsThere was no need to speak the restNo need to quiet any fears Of her- who ask'd no reason why, But turn'd on me her quiet eye!

Yet more than worthy of the love My spirit struggled with, and strove, When, on the mountain peak, alone, Ambition lent it a new toneI had no being- but in thee: The world, and all it did contain In the earth- the air- the sea Its joy- its little lot of pain That was new pleasure- the ideal, Dim vanities of dreams by nightAnd dimmer nothings which were real(Shadows- and a more shadowy light!) Parted upon their misty wings, And, so, confusedly, became Thine image, and- a name- a name!

Two separate- yet most intimate things.

I was ambitious- have you known The passion, father? You have not: A cottager, I mark'd a throne Of half the world as all my own, And murmur'd at such lowly lotBut, just like any other dream, Upon the vapour of the dew My own had past, did not the beam Of beauty which did while it thro' The minute- the hour- the day- oppress My mind with double loveliness.

We walk'd together on the crown Of a high mountain which look'd down Afar from its proud natural towers Of rock and forest, on the hillsThe dwindled hills! begirt with bowers, And shouting with a thousand rills.

I spoke to her of power and pride, But mystically- in such guise That she might deem it nought beside The moment's converse; in her eyes I read, perhaps too carelesslyA mingled feeling with my ownThe flush on her bright cheek, to me Seem'd to become a queenly throne Too well that I should let it be Light in the wilderness alone.

I wrapp'd myself in grandeur then, And donn'd a visionary crown
Yet it was not that Fantasy Had thrown her mantle over me
But that, among the rabble- men, Lion ambition is chained down
And crouches to a keeper's hand Not so in deserts
where the grand The wild- the terrible conspire
With their own breath to fan his fire.

Look 'round thee now on Samarcand!

Is not she queen of Earth? her pride Above all cities? in her hand
Their destinies? in all beside Of glory which the world hath known
Stands she not nobly and alone? Falling- her veriest stepping-stone
Shall form the pedestal of a throne And who her sovereign?
Timour- he Whom the astonished people saw Striding o'er
empires haughtily A diadem'd outlaw!

O, human love! thou spirit given On Earth, of all we hope in Heaven!

Which fall'st into the soul like rain Upon the Siroc-wither'd plain,
And, failing in thy power to bless, But leav'st the heart a wilderness!

Idea! which bindest life around With music of so strange a sound,
And beauty of so wild a birth Farewell! for I have won the Earth.

When Hope, the eagle that tower'd, could see No cliff beyond him in the sky,
His pinions were bent droopingly And homeward turn'd his soften'd eye.

'Twas sunset: when the sun will part There comes a sullenness of heart
To him who still would look upon The glory of the summer sun.

That soul will hate the ev'ning mist, So often lovely, and will list
To the sound of the coming darkness (known To those whose spirits hearken) as one
Who, in a dream of night, would fly But cannot from a danger nigh.

What tho' the moon- the white moon Shed all the splendour of her noon,
Her smile is chilly, and her beam, In that time of dreariness, will seem
(So like you gather in your breath) A portrait taken after death.

And boyhood is a summer sun Whose waning is the dreariest one
For all we live to know is known, And all we seek to keep hath flown
Let life, then, as the day-flower, fall With the noon-day beauty- which is all.

I reach'd my home- my home no more For all had flown who made it so.

I pass'd from out its mossy door, And, tho' my tread was soft and low,
A voice came from the threshold stone Of one whom I had earlier known
O, I defy thee, Hell, to show On beds of fire that burn below,
A humbler heart- a deeper woe.

Father, I firmly do believe I know- for Death, who comes for me
From regions of the blest afar, Where there is nothing to deceive,
Hath left his iron gate ajar, And rays of truth you cannot see
Are flashing thro' Eternity I do believe that Eblis hath
A snare in every human path Else how, when in the holy grove I wandered

of the idol, Love, Who daily scents his snowy wings With incense of burnt offerings From the most unpolluted things, Whose pleasant bowers are yet so riven Above with trellis'd rays from Heaven, No mote may shun- no tiniest fly The lightning of his eagle eye How was it that Ambition crept, Unseen, amid the revels there, Till growing bold, he laughed and leapt In the tangles of Love's very hair?

THE END