

Excerpt from “Tithonus”

by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

In Greek mythology, Tithonus is a Trojan kidnapped by Eos, the goddess of the dawn, to be her lover. Tithonus asked Eos to give him immortal life, and she granted his wish. In this poem, Tithonus describes what happened to him as a result.

1. The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,
2. The vapours weep their **burthen*** to the ground,
3. Man comes and tills the eld and lies beneath,
4. And after many a summer dies the swan.
5. Me only cruel immortality
6. Consumes; I wither slowly in thine arms,
7. Here at the quiet limit of the world,
8. A white-hair'd shadow roaming like a dream
9. The ever-silent spaces of the East,
10. Far-folded mists, and gleaming halls of morn.
11. Alas! for this gray shadow, once a man—
12. So glorious in his beauty and thy choice,
13. Who madest him thy chosen, that he seem'd
14. To his great heart none other than a God!
15. I ask'd thee, “Give me immortality.”
16. Then didst thou grant mine asking with a smile,
17. Like wealthy men who care not how they give.
18. But thy strong Hours indignant work'd their wills,
19. And beat me down and marr'd and wasted me,
20. And tho' they could not end me, left me maim'd
21. To dwell in presence of immortal youth,
22. Immortal age beside immortal youth,
23. And all I was in ashes. Can thy love
24. Thy beauty, make amends, tho' even now,
25. Close over us, the silver star, thy guide,
26. Shines in those tremulous eyes that I with tears
27. To hear me? Let me go: take back thy gift:
28. Why should a man desire in any way
29. To vary from the kindly race of men,
30. Or pass beyond the goal of ordinance
31. Where all should pause, as is most meet for all?

***burthen: an archaic form of burden; heavy load**

1.

How does the structure of the poem emphasize its central ideas?

- A The poem is divided into many short lines to break up the narrative, mirroring the frustration Tithonus feels.
- B The ideas in the poem are arranged as a series of contrasts between the good and bad aspects of immortality, illustrating Tithonus's mixed feelings.
- C The poem begins and ends with Tithonus asking for a favor, demonstrating his desire for a change.
- D The poem starts in the present, flashes back to Tithonus's youth, and then returns to the present, showing the endless nature of Tithonus's situation.

2.

In lines 15-27, what irony does the speaker develop regarding his relationship with Eos?

- A Tithonus loves Eos, but that very love keeps her from loving him in return.
- B What Tithonus thought would be a blessing turns out to be a curse.
- C Tithonus had to give up his youth and beauty to find true happiness.
- D When Tithonus asked Eos for a gift, he was giving something precious to her.

3.

Why does the speaker call immortality "cruel" in line 5 of the poem?

- A Immortality is cruel because the speaker is getting older and older.
- B Immortality is cruel because life has become the same from day to day.
- C Immortality is cruel because the speaker has lost all his friends except Eos.
- D Immortality is cruel because life has no more kindness and affection.

4.

How do the first four lines contribute to the structure of the poem?

- A The lines provide background for the speaker's request for immortality, contrasting the past to the present.
- B The lines explain reasons for a person to seek immortality, helping to develop a central idea of the poem.
- C The lines describe the setting of the poem, providing context for the speaker's actions that follow.
- D The lines give examples of the normal course of life and death, introducing the speaker's unusual situation.

5.

Part A

Which sentence best expresses the themes in the poem?

- A It is sad to grow old and still remember what it was like to be young.
- B It is better to accept being human than to wish for immortality.
- C It is wise to live life to its fullest because no one is immortal.
- D It is good to find a compatible person for a lifelong marriage.

6.

Part B

Which lines from the end of the poem best support the correct answer to Part A?

- A "But thy strong Hours indignant work'd their wills, /
And beat me down and marr'd and wasted me," (lines 18–19)
- B "To dwell in presence of immortal youth, /
Immortal age beside immortal youth," (lines 21–22)
- C "And all I was in ashes. Can thy love /
Thy beauty, make amends, tho' even now," (lines 23–24)
- D "Why should a man desire in any way /
To vary from the kindly race of men," (lines 28–29)

7.

Why does the speaker indicate, in line 17, that Eos gave Tithonus immortality “Like wealthy men who care not how they give”?

- (A) Granting the wish was easy for Eos because she did not know the future costs.
- (B) The cost of giving immortality was less than the cost of refusing to do so.
- (C) Making someone immortal seemed like a good investment for future happiness.
- (D) People who already own something do not mind giving a little of it away.

8.

Part A

Why does the speaker describe himself as a “shadow” in lines 8 and 11?

- (A) He has wished for immortality for so long that he resembles a shadow.
- (B) He has aged so much that he is like a shadow and not a real person.
- (C) His eyesight has failed so much that he sees shadows instead of real objects.
- (D) His love for Eos has weakened him so much that he feels like a shadow.

9.

Part B

Which line from the poem suggests a condition similar to being a shadow?

- (A) “So glorious in his beauty and thy choice,” (line 12)
- (B) “Who madest him thy chosen, . . .” (line 13)
- (C) “But thy strong Hours indignant work’d their wills,” (line 18)
- (D) “And beat me down and marr’d and wasted me,” (line 19)

#10 is on the next page!!!!!!!!!!

10.

What are two central ideas in the poem?

- The speaker values the contrast between youth and old age.
- The speaker affirms his eternal love and admiration for Eos.
- The speaker is deeply unhappy in his current condition.
- The speaker has discovered the reasons for what happened to him.
- The speaker wants Eos take away his immortality.
- The speaker wants to keep Eos from shedding any more tears.