

Tithonus by Lord Alfred Tennyson

'*Tithonus*' by Lord Alfred Tennyson is written in the form of a [dramatic monologue](#) in which only one [speaker](#) is used to tell an entire story. There is no consistent rhyme scheme or pattern of meter in the piece, meaning that it is written in blank or [free verse](#).

'*Tithonus*' was first written under the title "Tithon" in 1833. It did not appear to a wide readership until 1859 when it was published under its full name. While not one of Tennyson's most popular or well-known pieces, '*Tithonus*' is characteristic of the poet's style and a wonderful example of his ability to expand on already existing myths and legends.

Summary of *Tithonus*

'*Tithonus*' by [Lord Alfred Tennyson](#) describes the plight of Tithonus who is cursed to an immortal life in which he continues to age.

The poem begins with the speaker, Tithonus, desiring how sorrowful the naturally aging woods make him. Unlike all the other elements of the world, he is unable to die. He cannot, as they do, return to the earth and become something new. He is slowly being consumed by the hours of his life that will never end. He is stuck in the "East" with his once beloved Eos who is the cause of his wretched state, (see About the Myth for more details).

The speaker describes himself as no longer being a man, but a mere shadow who is forced to see the never-aging face of his beloved ever morning. In the next few line, he quickly outlines how he came to be this way. He describes asking Eos for immortality and her granting it to him without considering his youth. He will never pass beyond the "goal of ordinance" or reach death, as other men do. It is obvious to him now the mistake he has made.

Every morning of Tithonus' life he is forced to see the sunrise and observe Eos' chariot take her into the sky where he once adored her. Every day he asks her to take back what she has given but receives no answer. He fears that she is unable to retract something she has given out. In the next section of the poem, the speaker is remembering an old lover he used to have and the simple times they were together. It is this life that he should have had. They lay together, touching mouths and eyelids without pretense or the pull of immortality.

The poem concludes with the speaker asking that Eos free him from the East where he has been trapped and allow him to die. If he was to do so, he could join the other men in the earth and she could always look down on his grave.

About the Myth

[Tithonus](#) is a character that features in Greek mythology and is the son of a King of Troy, Laomedon. His mother was born of the river Scamander. In the story, Eos, or Aurora, the embodiment of dawn, fell in love with Tithonus. Together they had two children.

After this, in an effort to stay with her beloved forever, Eos asks the god Zeus to grant Tithonus eternal life. Zeus agreed to this proposition but Eos had not been specific enough. Tithonus was to live forever, but also continue aging. He would not retain his youth as Eos would. Throughout his long life, Tithonus continued to age, never reaching the threshold of death.

In Tennyson's version of this myth, it is not Zeus that grants immortality but Eos herself.