

## = Tamerlane and Other Poems =

Tamerlane and Other Poems is the first published work by American writer Edgar Allan Poe . The short collection of poems was first published in 1827 . Today , it is believed only 12 copies of the collection still exist .

Poe abandoned his foster family , the Allans , and moved to Boston to find work in 1827 . Having only minor success , he enlisted in the United States Army . He brought with him several manuscripts , which he paid a printer named Calvin F. S. Thomas to publish . The 40 @-@ page collection was called Tamerlane and Other Poems and did not include Poe 's name . Distribution was limited to 50 copies and it received no critical attention . The poems were largely inspired by Lord Byron , including the long title poem " Tamerlane " , which depicts an historical conqueror who laments the loss of his first romance . Like much of Poe 's future work , the poems in Tamerlane and Other Poems include themes of love , death , and pride .

Poe 's first published collection is so rare that after Poe 's death , Rufus Wilmot Griswold believed it had never existed until one was found in 1859 . It has since been recognized as one of the rarest first editions in American literature .

## = = Background = =

Edgar Poe was unable to complete studies at the University of Virginia due to gambling debts . He left the university in March 1827 and the already @-@ strained relationship with his foster father , John Allan , grew worse . Poe determined to go to Boston , where he was born . When Poe 's biological mother Eliza Poe died , the only object she left him was a watercolor painting of the city , on the back of which she had written , " For my little son Edgar , who should ever love Boston , the place of his birth , and where his mother found her best and most sympathetic friends . " John Allan , a merchant in Richmond , Virginia , refused to give his foster son the \$ 12 for the trip , though it is likely Poe got the money from his foster mother Frances Allan . John Allan was not aware of Poe 's decision or whereabouts and , not concerned , wrote " I 'm thinking Edgar has gone to Sea to seek his own fortunes " . After arriving in Boston in April 1827 , Poe served briefly as clerk for a wholesale merchandise warehouse on the waterfront , then as an office clerk and reporter for an obscure newspaper , the Weekly Report . After several weeks , in desperation , he enlisted in the United States Army for a five @-@ year term under the pseudonym " Edgar A. Perry " ; he gave his age as 22 , though he was only 18 , likely because he would have needed parental consent if under 21 . He was assigned to the First Regiment of Artillery and stationed at Boston Harbor 's Fort Independence .

Up to this point , Poe had not written much poetry . His earliest lines of verse were a couplet labeled " Poetry " , presumably written sometime in 1824 in the ledger book of Allan & Ellis , his foster father 's mercantile company . The lines read : " Last night with many cares & toils oppress 'd / Weary , I laid me on a couch to rest ? " . The earliest known full @-@ length poem by Poe , " O , Tempora ! O , Mores ! " , is a satirical poem whose authorship is the subject of some dispute . Nevertheless , calling himself " irrecoverably a poet " , he had been working on a few longer poems at the University of Virginia , whose manuscripts he brought with him to Boston .

## = = Publication history = =

Sometime in the spring of 1827 , Poe turned over his manuscripts to an 18 @-@ year @-@ old printer named Calvin F. S. Thomas , whose family may have been known by Poe 's birth parents . Thomas had previously only printed labels , flyers , and other small jobs . Poe used his own money to pay for the publication of his poems as the 40 @-@ page collection Tamerlane and Other Poems , the only known book printed by Thomas . The collection was pamphlet @-@ sized , 6 @.@ 75 by 4 @.@ 5 inches . Poe was 18 years old when the collection was released in July 1827 and only 50 copies were printed . The total production number is the subject of dispute ; various scholars believe the number was slightly lower ( only 20 copies ) or substantially higher ( as many as 200 ) .

Tamerlane and Other Poems was published anonymously with the credit granted to " a Bostonian " . His name , typically listed as " Edgar A. Poe " , was not published with his work until his second collection , *Al Aaraaf , Tamerlane , and Minor Poems* in late 1829 . Poe may have chosen not to give his name so that his foster father , John Allan , would not know where he was ; moreover , his choice to embrace his Bostonian heritage may have been an attempt to distance himself from the Allan family in Richmond . Boston was , at the time , a center for publishing and the literary world . By the time the book was released , Poe was already in the Army .

Poe introduced the collection with an apologetic notice admitting the low quality of his poems . He said they were not intended to ever be published and " why they are now published concerns no one " but the author . He claimed , however , that the majority of the poems were written between 1820 and 1821 , " when the author had not completed his fourteenth year " though this is assumed to be an exaggeration . Poe used the low circulation of this collection to attract readers later in his career , suggesting the 1827 poetry book had been " suppressed through circumstances of a private nature " . That second collection , *Al Aaraaf , Tamerlane , and Minor Poems* , included revised versions of five of the nine poems from *Tamerlane and Other Poems* .

Distribution of *Tamerlane and Other Poems* was so light that Rufus Wilmot Griswold in 1850 claimed it had never existed , noting that none had been found . The first known copy turned up in 1859 with a second found in 1874 . A type facsimile of a copy held by the British Museum , edited and introduced by Richard Herne Shepherd , was published as a limited edition in 1884 . Another copy of *Tamerlane and Other Poems* was published in a 1941 facsimile by Thomas Ollive Mabbott , who provided the introduction ; his correction and additions to this are found in a subsequent publication .

= = Themes = =

The poems , many of which had a theme of youth , were inspired in part by the works of Percy Bysshe Shelley , and Samuel Taylor Coleridge . The largest inspiration on Poe , however , came from the work of Lord Byron ; the character of the title poem " *Tamerlane* " has a daughter named " Ada " , named after Byron 's own daughter Ada Lovelace . Poe admired Byron both for his poetry and for his rebellious personality . John Allan blamed Poe 's interest in Byron for his licentiousness . Some biographers suggest that Poe 's wandering to Boston and joining the Army represent a need to live like an outcast inspired by Byron .

The title poem , " *Tamerlane* " , depicts a dying conqueror who regrets leaving his childhood sweetheart and his home to pursue his ambitions . In its original form , " *Tamerlane* " , based on the historical Timur , was 406 lines . The choice of an eastern character was unusual for a westerner at the time , though Byron , François @-@ René de Chateaubriand , Thomas Moore and others had written other Orientalist works . Autobiographical overtones suggest Poe based the poem on the loss of his own early love , Sarah Elmira Royster , or of his birth mother Eliza Poe . The poem may also mirror Poe 's relationship with his foster father John Allan ; similar to Poe , *Tamerlane* is of uncertain parentage , with a " feigned name " .

The " other poems " , which Poe admitted " perhaps savour too much of egotism ; but they were written by one too young to have any knowledge of the world but from his own breast " . These poems present the poet as solitary figure who was faced some unnamed transforming childhood event . Poe adopted some of the common themes of the day , including imagery of heavenly bliss and angelic beauty . He steps away from the typical use of didacticism of the time and instead focuses on psychological reverie and symbolist aesthetics , beginning his lifelong poetic refusal to write for the masses . Poe would continue to revisit themes of death , beauty , love , and pride in his later works . He would later rewrite one poem , " *Imitation* " , as " *A Dream Within a Dream* " and use images from " *Evening Star* " in " *Ulalume* " .

= = Critical reception = =

*Tamerlane and Other Poems* was virtually ignored and received no significant critical attention upon

its publication . The only public notice of it was a mention of the title in a couple lists of recent books : The United States Review and Literary Gazette listed it in August and the North American Review listed it in October 1827 . Samuel Kettell listed Tamerlane and Other Poems in his " Catalogue of American Poetry " section of his three @-@ volume anthology Specimens of American Poetry in 1829 . Literary historian Joel Porte suggests the American reading public during this period was more interested in fiction than poetry . Despite its lack of attention , the publication of Tamerlane and Other Poems gave a young Poe the confidence to continue writing .

After Poe became more popular with " The Raven " , a reviewer who saw parts of Tamerlane and Other Poems commented , " ' Poems written during youth ' no matter by whom written , are best preserved for the eye of the writer " . Modern scholar Joseph Wood Krutch said the collection " save for a few poems , [ was ] distinctly prentice work " . Poe biographer Arthur Hobson Quinn wrote : " The perfection which marked Poe 's great lyrics was , of course , not yet present . But the promise was there . " Quinn also credits Poe for publishing a collection of poetry before slightly older contemporaries who would become popular poets , including Ralph Waldo Emerson , Henry Wadsworth Longfellow , John Greenleaf Whittier , and Oliver Wendell Holmes , Sr. Scholar Harry Lee Poe , a distant relative of Poe , wrote in 2008 that the collection did not include great poetry . However , he added , " it was the trumpet blast announcing that a new poet had stepped upon the stage " .

It is believed only a dozen copies of the original printing of Tamerlane and Other Poems remain , making it one of the rarest of first editions in American literature . Ironically , the value of one copy today is more money than Poe ever made in his lifetime . Its rarity was recognized in 1925 , when the Saturday Evening Post ran an article titled " Have You A Tamerlane in Your Attic " ? After the article ran , a woman in Worcester , Massachusetts named Ada S. Dodd searched and found a copy , prompting others to search as well . Today , most of the surviving copies are owned by libraries and museums . Two copies , for example , were purchased by The Huntington Library in New York in 1915 . One copy is on display as part of the collection at the Edgar Allan Poe Museum in Richmond , Virginia . Though copies do not circulate often , they command high prices when they do . One sold at auction for \$ 125 @,@ 000 and , later , another sold for \$ 198 @,@ 000 . In December 2009 , a copy from the William E. Self collection sold at Christie 's , New York for \$ 662 @,@ 500 , a record price paid for a work of American literature .

= = Content = =

The work was originally published without a table of contents , later editions and commentary use the titles or first lines to identify the poems . Much of the content was reworked , occasionally retitled , by Poe for later collections

The preface , pages iii @-@ iv

" Tamerlane "

Other poems , also known as " Fugitive pieces "

" To ? ? " ( now known as " Song " )

Dreams

" Visits of the Dead " ( now known as " Spirits of the Dead " )

" Evening Star "

" Imitation "

Untitled poem : " In youth have I known . . . " ( " Stanzas " )

Untitled poem : " A wilder 'd being from my birth . . . " ( see " A Dream " )

Untitled poem : " The happiest day ? the happiest hour . . . " ( see " The Happiest Day " )

" The Lake "

The author 's endnotes