

= Al Aaraaf =

" Al Aaraaf " is an early poem by American writer Edgar Allan Poe , first published in 1829 . It is based on stories from the Qur 'an , and tells of the afterlife in a place called Al Aaraaf . At 422 lines , it is Poe 's longest poem .

" Al Aaraaf " , which Poe claimed to have written before he was 15 , was first published as the major poem in Poe 's 1829 collection Al Aaraaf , Tamerlane , and Minor Poems . The book and " Al Aaraaf " in particular received mostly negative reviews for its complexity , obscure references , and odd structure . Some , however , noted the potential in the young poet , including John C. Neal , to whom Poe had shown " Al Aaraaf " prior to publication . Poe would later refer to Neal 's response as the first words of encouragement he had received . Nevertheless , the negative response to " Al Aaraaf " may have inspired Poe 's later poetic theory that poems should be kept short .

Years later , in 1845 , Poe used " Al Aaraaf " to hoax members of the Boston literary circle during a reading . Poe claimed the poem was a new one and his audience was perplexed by it . He later claimed a Boston crowd did not deserve a new poem . He held a strong dislike for New England poets and the New England @-@ based Transcendental movement and hoped by presenting a poem he had written in his youth would prove Bostonians did not know good literature .

= = Overview = =

" Al Aaraaf " is the longest poem Poe wrote and was inspired by Tycho Brahe 's discovery of a supernova back in 1572 which was visible for about seventeen months . Poe identified this nova with Al Aaraaf , a star that was the place between paradise and hell . Al @-@ A`raaf (Arabic ??????? , alternatively transcribed A?raf or Al Orf) was a place where people who have been neither markedly good nor markedly bad had to stay until forgiven by God and let into Paradise , as discussed in Sura 7 of the Qur 'an . As Poe explained to a potential publisher :

Its title is " Al Aaraaf " from the Al Aaraaf of the Arabians , a medium between Heaven and Hell where men suffer no punishment , but yet do not attain that tranquil & even happiness which they suppose to be the characteristics of heavenly enjoyment .

In the opening section of the poem , God commands Nesace , a name for Beauty 's spirit , to convey a message to " other worlds " . Nesace rouses the angel Ligeia and tells her to awaken the other thousand seraphs to perform God 's work . Two souls , however , fail to respond : the " maiden @-@ angel " Ianthe and her " seraph @-@ lover " Angelo (Michelangelo) , who describes his death on earth and the flight of his spirit to Al Aaraaf . Ianthe and Angelo are lovers , and their failure to do as Nesace commanded results in God not allowing them into heaven .

= = Analysis = =

" Al Aaraaf " is thick with allusions and , because of this , is often avoided by scholars because , as writer Arthur Hobson Quinn notes , it can be " unintelligible " . Nevertheless , Quinn says it possesses qualities which are important to understand the development of Poe 's skills as a poet . " Al Aaraaf " mixes historical facts , religious mythology and elements of Poe 's imagination . The poem primarily focuses on the afterlife , ideal love , and ideal beauty in relation to passion . The majority of the poem focuses on this reaching for ideal beauty and aesthetics . Characters in the poem serve as representative symbols of personified emotions . The goddess Nesace is beauty , Ligeia represents the music in nature , Ianthe and Angelo are creatures of passion .

The poem draws from Sura 7 (Arabic ???????) in the Qur 'an ; Poe also drew upon the Qur 'an in other works , including " The Thousand @-@ and @-@ Second Tale of Scheherazade " . In " Al Aaraaf " , Poe was probably less interested in the Qur 'an itself and more interested in an atmosphere of the exotic or otherworldliness . The true setting of the poem is a sort of dreamscape or alternative world . As critic Floyd Stovall wrote , the theme of the poem is " one of disillusionment with the world and escape into some more congenial realm of dream or of the imagination " .

The star which prompted Poe to write " Al Aaraaf " was believed to foretell disaster or that humanity

would be punished for breaking God 's laws . Poe may have gotten the idea to base a poem on Brahe 's astronomical discovery from poet John Keats 's use of the 1781 discovery of the planet Uranus in a poem called " On First Looking into Chapman 's Homer " (1816) . The name of the star has been changed from " Al Orf " to " Al Aaraaf " to become similar to the word arafa , which means distinguishing between things . Additionally , Poe was indebted to Irish poet Thomas Moore , whose poem Lalla @-@ Rookh inspired , among other parts of " Al Aaraaf " , the catalogue of flowers near the beginning . Another work by Moore , The Loves of the Angels , inspired Poe 's idea of uniting mortal and immortal love .

Structurally , the 422 @-@ line " Al Aaraaf " has no discernible or consistent poetic rhythm , though the meter resembles a section of Lord Byron 's Manfred . Instead of formal structure , the poem focuses on the flow of sound . Poet Daniel Hoffman analyzed the fluctuating meter and determined that Part I begins as octosyllabic couplets then shifts to pentameter couplets with occasional interludes of alternately rhymed trimeter @-@ dimeters . Part II generally uses pentameter couplets with an interlude of anapestic dimeters .

= = Publication history = =

Poe claimed he wrote " Al Aaraaf " before he was 15 years old , though he would later adapt his claim . A few passages from the poem were first published in the May 19 , 1829 , issue of the Baltimore Gazette signed " Marlow " . Poe first offered the complete poem to publishers Carey , Lea & Carey in Philadelphia around May 1829 . He wrote to them , " If the poem is published , succeed or not , I am ' irrecoverably a poet . ' But to your opinion I leave it " . He met with Isaac Lea , who was willing to publish it so long as they were protected against any loss . Poe asked his foster @-@ father John Allan to subsidize the printing but , not supportive of Poe 's literary pursuits , he refused . By July 28 , Poe wrote to the publishers asking for the return of his manuscript because , as he said , he had " made a better disposition of my poems than I had any right to expect " .

" Al Aaraaf " finally saw print for the first time in the collection Al Aaraaf , Tamerlane , and Minor Poems . 250 copies of the 71 @-@ page work was issued by Hatch and Dunning of Baltimore , Maryland in December 1829 . Though Poe had already self @-@ published Tamerlane and Other Poems , he considered Al Aaraaf , Tamerlane , and Minor Poems his first book . Though this was not entirely true , it was the first work published with his name , signed " Edgar A. Poe " . Poe addressed the obscurity in " Al Aaraaf " by including multiple footnotes , many of which were left untranslated from French , Latin , and Spanish . " Al Aaraaf " was published in its entirety only once in Poe 's lifetime , though some critics believe Poe never actually completed the poem because Poe implied it was originally intended to have four parts or 400 lines .

= = Critical response = =

Upon publication , " Al Aaraaf " and the other poems in Poe 's collection drew harsh criticism because of how difficult it was to understand . Among the early reviewers was John Hill Hewitt , who wrote of Poe that " no man has been more shamefully overestimated " . In trying to explain the title poem , he wrote , " all our brain @-@ cudgeling could not compel us to understand it line by line or the sum total " . A reviewer for the Baltimore Minerva and Emerald asked , " Has the poet been struck dumb with palsy ? " Before publication , Poe had sought the advice of William Wirt , who had earned a reputation as a distinguished man of letters in Baltimore . On " Al Aaraaf " , Wirt wrote that he was not the best judge of poetry but believed that it might be accepted by modern @-@ thinking readers . As he wrote , " but to deal candidly ... (as I am bound to do) I should doubt whether the poem will take with old @-@ fashioned readers like myself " . Sarah Josepha Hale of Godey 's Lady 's Book noted that " Al Aaraaf " must have been written by a young author because it was " boyish , feeble , and altogether deficient in the common characteristics of poetry " . Nevertheless , she still called the author a genius . A reviewer for the American Ladies ' Magazine also commented on the poet 's age : " [the] author who appears to be very young , is evidently a fine genius , but he wants judgment , experience , tact " .

Poe 's boasted that these early poems were superior to most other examples in American poetry . Critic John Neal , who was a friend of Poe 's cousin George Poe , responded to Poe 's claim in his review of " Al Aaraaf " for the Yankee and Boston Literary Gazette . He said Poe 's boast was " rather exquisite nonsense " but that the young author showed promise and predicted that some day Poe might " make a beautiful and perhaps a magnificent poem " to prove his claim . He believed that if future poems by Poe were as good as some of his best lines in " Al Aaraaf " :

He will deserve to stand high ? very high ? in the estimation of the shining brotherhood . Whether he will do so however , must depend , not so much upon his words now in mere poetry , as upon his worth hereafter in something yet loftier and more generous ? we allude to the stronger properties of the mind , to the magnanimous determination that enables a youth to endure the present , whatever the present may be , in the hope , or rather in the belief , the fixed , unwavering belief , that in the future he will find his reward .

Neal 's encouragement , which came prior to publication , led Poe to include a dedication to Neal in the collection Al Aaraaf , Tamerlane , and Minor Poems . Poe 's cousin Neilson Poe was impressed by Neal 's endorsement and wrote , " Our name will be a great one yet . " Edgar Poe would refer to Neal 's comments as " the very first words of encouragement I remember to have heard . " Poe himself admitted that " Al Aaraaf " had some " good poetry " in it as well as " much extravagance , which I have not had time to throw away " .

In the 20th century , poet Daniel Hoffman referred to " Al Aaraaf " as " Poe 's most ambitious failure " , suggesting it is a " fractured " attempt at an epic poem that " ran out of gas " . Biographer Jeffrey Meyers called it Poe 's " most turgid and opaque poem " .

= = Legacy = =

" Al Aaraaf " includes names Poe would later reuse : Ligeia and Zante . Some of the themes in the poem also foreshadow a future poem , " The City in the Sea " (1831) . The critical failure of both " Al Aaraaf " and " Tamerlane " convinced Poe that long poems are inherently flawed because they cannot sustain a proper mood or a high quality poetic form . Because of this , he never again experimented with long poetry . He would later write of his theory on short poetry in " The Poetic Principle " in 1848 . In that essay , he wrote " A long poem does not exist . I maintain that the phrase , ' a long poem , ' is simply a flat contradiction in terms . " Instead , he says , epic poetry and other long poems are actually a series of short poems strung together . Critics have suggested that this theory was written so that Poe could justify why " Al Aaraaf " was unpopular .

After the publication of " The Raven " in 1845 , Poe became a household name and , having reached the height of his poetic fame , he was often asked to lecture or recite poetry at public events . One such invitation came from the Boston Lyceum in October 1845 , arranged with help from James Russell Lowell . Poe had a strong dislike for the Boston literary scene and the city itself , despite having been born there . Nevertheless , he accepted the \$ 50 fee and the challenge of writing a brand new poem for his appearance .

Fresh off his public feud with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and his dislike of the Massachusetts @-@ based Transcendentalism movement , Poe instead decided to play a trick on his Boston audience . The program , held October 16 at Boston 's Odeon Theater , was a grand event and featured a speech by Massachusetts statesman Caleb Cushing which was two and a half hours long . Poe read " Al Aaraaf " , renamed " The Messenger Star " for the event , and tried to convince his Boston audience that the poem he wrote as a young man was new . The audience was confused by the obscure poem and many left during its recitation . Poe ended with " The Raven " , as the theater manager noted , " thus enabling us to make some show of front after a most lamentable defeat . "

Poe considered the hoax an opportunity to prove that Bostonians did not know good literature . Based on critical reaction , he believed he was right . The editor of the Boston Courier reviewed " The Messenger Star " as " an elegant and classic production , based on the right principles , containing the essence of true poetry , mingled with a gorgeous imagination " . When Poe claimed that he wrote the poem before he had turned 12 , Cornelia Wells Walter of the Boston Evening Transcript wrote of her shock : " A poem delivered before a literary association of adults , as written

by a boy ! Only think of it ! " It is unclear how old Poe was at the time he wrote the poem because , in part , he frequently changed his claim . Lewis Gaylord Clark said Poe 's age at writing the poem was irrelevant and , though he admitted the audience did not know the author 's age , " they only knew it was sad stuff " . Modern biographer Daniel Stashower compared Poe 's stunt with the story " The Imp of the Perverse " , in which Poe wrote about " an earnest desire to tantalize a listener ... The speaker is aware that he displeases . "

Upon his return to New York , Poe wrote in the Broadway Journal his view of the event . After noting that he refused to offer a didactic poem , he wrote :

It could scarcely be supposed that we would put ourselves to the trouble of composing for the Bostonians anything in the shape of an original poem ... We do not , ourselves , think the poem a remarkably good one : ? it is not sufficiently transcendental . Still it did well enough for the Boston audience ? who evinced characteristic discrimination in understanding , and especially applauding , all those knotty passages which we ourselves have not yet been able to understand ... If we cared a fig for their wrath we should not first have insulted them to their teeth , and then subjected to their tender mercies a volume of our Poems .

" Al Aaraaf " was used between 1928 and 1952 as a pen name by the noted Glasgow artist Hannah Frank .