

Sonnet: To Science

Edgar Allan Poe

Science! true daughter of old Time thou art,
Who alterest all things with thy peering eyes.¹
Why preyest thou thus upon the poet's heart,
Vulture, whose wings are dull realities?
5 How should he love thee, or how deem thee wise,
Who wouldst not leave him in his wandering
To seek for treasure in the jewelled skies,
Albeit he soared with an undaunted wing?
Hast thou not dragged Diana from her car,
10 And driven the hamadryad from the wood
To seek a shelter in some happier star?
Hast thou not torn the naiad from her flood,
The elfin from the green grass, and from me
The summer dream beneath the tamarind tree?

Questions for Discussion and Writing

1. What characteristics make this poem a **sonnet**?
2. Whom is the **speaker** addressing, and what literary devices does the speaker employ in doing so? Describe the speaker's **tone**. Cite specific details to support your interpretation.
3. In what sense does science "alter all things" (line 2)?
4. What is the "Vulture" (line 4)? Why is it described this way? What **rhetorical device** is this an example of? How is the description of its wings **paradoxical** (line 4), and what is the effect of this paradox?
5. Describe the purpose and effect of the **rhetorical questions** the speaker asks.
6. What do you think is the "treasure in the jewelled skies" (line 7)?
7. What other **rhetorical device** is used repeatedly in lines 9-13, and what is its effect?
8. What do you think the "summer dream beneath the tamarind tree" (line 14) represents to the speaker, and what has happened to it?

¹ Though the **observer effect** in science was not formally identified until long after Poe's death, there is an interesting parallel between it and Poe's description of the effect of science here.