

‘After’

Philip Bourke Marston

A LITTLE time for laughter,
— A little time to sing,
— A little time to kiss and cling,
And no more kissing after.

A little while for scheming
— Love's unperfected schemes;
— A little time for golden dreams,
Then no more any dreaming.

A little while 'twas given
— To me to have thy love;
— Now, like a ghost, alone I move
About a ruined heaven.

A little time for speaking
— Things sweet to say and hear;
— A time to seek, and find thee near,
Then no more any seeking.

A little time for saying
— Words the heart breaks to say;
— A short sharp time wherein to pray,
Then no more need of praying;

But long, long years to weep in,
— And comprehend the whole
— Great grief that desolates the soul,
And eternity to sleep in.

VOCABULARY

Scheming - planning, or plotting

Scheme - a plan

'Twas - it was

Thy - your

Thee - you

Seeking - searching for something

Wherein - in which

Comprehend - understand

Desolate - as a verb, the word means 'to ruin and leave empty'

STORY/SUMMARY

There was a little time for laughter, a little time for singing, to kiss and hug one another - and then there was no more kissing after that. // A little bit of time for planning, the imperfect plans of Love, and a little time for golden dreams, but then there was no more dreaming. // For a little while, I had your love; now I exist like a ghost, moving about ruined heaven. // There was a little time for speaking sweet things to each other, when I searched for you I'd find you near to me - but then after that, there was no more searching. // There was a little time to say things that make the heartbreak, a short sharp time where I would pray, but then there was no need to pray after that. // After we parted, there were just long, long years that I spent crying, time I spent thinking about the whole great grief that followed love, the grief that desolates the soul, and the eternity of sleep that follows after that.

SPEAKER/VOICE

The speaker takes on a **despondent tone** as he explores the 'eternity' that he feels trapped in, separated from his lover in a state of grief at having lost her. The **title** of the poem - 'After'- underscores the fact that the poem's topic is the anguish of unrequited love, that can seem to last forever if it is unprocessed and unresolved.

LANGUAGE DEVICES

Anaphora - the phrase '**a little time for**' is **repeated** at the beginning of the stanzas, and echoed in various forms throughout. It emphasises the sense of distance that the speaker feels between the past and present, as there was a short period of happiness with his lover, followed by a long state of grief afterwards.

Consonance - '**kiss and cling,**' - the repeated '**k**' sounds stick in this phrase, emphasising the closeness of the relationship.

Simile - 'like a ghost, I move alone / About a ruined heaven.' - the speaker compares himself to a ghost, implying that the state of loss in which he finds himself feels like a deathly state of being, a shadow of his former self. The term 'ruined heaven' implies that his relationship felt like paradise, and now it is destroyed - yet he is still stuck there, in the same space, without being able to move on.

Sibilance - 'speaking' / 'sweet to say' / 'seek' - the sibilant alliteration in the fourth stanza creates a sense of sweetness and harmony through the connected 's' sounds, before disrupting this atmosphere with the final line: '**Then no more any seeking.**'

STRUCTURE / FORM

Shift in tone - the **final line** of each stanza creates a shift in tone, from the positive feelings in the past, creating a sense of **bathos (anticlimax)** at the end of each line as the speaker considers his present state of misery and contrasts it with his previous happiness.

End stopping - each stanza is end-stopped, providing a feeling of closure and finality that mirrors the end of the speaker's relationship. Often the **final line repeats** the phrase 'no more', underscoring the speaker's break from the past.

Ending - the poem ends with abstract concepts, considering the 'long, long years' (**epizeuxis**) that have passed since the speaker was with his partner. His 'soul' feels wracked with a 'great grief', and he only can think of the 'sleep' of eternity, an **allusion** to death.

ATTITUDES

Grief puts an individual into a state of suffering - the speaker is stuck in an eternal torment, where his nostalgia for the past prevents him from living in the present.

The intensity of love can feel like a spiritual experience - a **semantic field of spirituality** is used to describe the feeling of love: 'ruined heaven', 'golden dreams', praying' 'soul'.

Heartache and loss cause despair - the sense of desolation that permeates the poem shows the speaker in a state of despair, similar to if the person had died, because she is no longer in the speaker's life.

CONTEXT

Philip Bourke Marston (1850-1887) was a Victorian English poet, the son of a dramatist and literary critic. He became partially sighted early in life, due to ingesting the poisonous plant belladonna which was wrongly administered to him as a medicine. This led him to find solace in literature and music, and he became known for his tragic and melancholy poetry - which often contrasts hopes and dreams with mundane reality.

THEMES

TASK: Pick two of the themes below, make a mind map and add four separate quotations that relate to them. Make short notes of analysis, explaining how and why each one relates to your theme. What, in your opinion, is the poet's final message or statement about each theme that you chose?

- Love
- Grief
- Loss
- Time
- Relationships
- Spirituality

POSSIBLE ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the poem's exploration of the connection between grief and time.
2. In what ways does Marston present the theme of love?