

Pontus De Tyard, 1570

Dreams and Despair: In this contemplative segment of "Grass of Parnassus," the concept of dreams versus reality and the fleeting hope provided by the emotion of love are deeply explored. The passage opens with a lament for a figure who, without the saving grace of love, is deemed to spend her days in desolation, her wisdom derived from dull experiences rather than joyful discovery. This character's last hope is the transformative power of Love—a force capable of rendering her the "fairest of fair things" and rescuing her from the brink of death with its healing touch, even if it's just a shadow passing by.

The narrative then delves into the nature of dreams, challenging the assertion that sleep brings equality of fortune to the happy and the hapless. Dreams are portrayed not as a unifying experience but as paths divergent, leading to reflections of regret, battles of existential dread, or flights of fantasy to realms beyond the waking life's reach. The distinction is stark; dreams can be a playground for cherished memories and desires, or they can be a battleground of fears and struggles, highlighting the unequal fortunes that follow us even into our subconscious.

Two Sonnets of the Sirens: Transitioning from the individual's introspection, the text introduces the tale of the Sirens—mythological beings associated with allure and doom—as once being maidens who shared an intimate bond with Proserpine. The narrative shifts from the inner turmoil and dreams of mortals to a mythic example of loss and mourning. Consumed by despair over Proserpine's abduction, the Sirens transformed, becoming symbols of irresistible but fatal attraction. Their mournful songs, once perhaps expressions of sorrow and longing, now serve to lure sailors to their demise—a stark transformation from innocence to instruments of death, underscoring themes of transformation, the persuasive power of despair, and the fatal allure of seeking comfort in illusions.

Conclusion: Through a combination of solemn reflections on love's potential to redeem, the varied tapestry of dreams, and the tragic fate of the Sirens, this segment of "Grass of Parnassus" weaves together the complex interplay between hope, despair, and the human condition. Each element—whether it be the yearning for love, the escapism found in dreams, or the mythic cautionary tales—serves to highlight the fragility of happiness and the omnipresence of longing and loss.

