Passion

SUMMARY

I lay in a state of longing. The sight of the sky hurt me. Every cloud I saw looked like a boat drifting away without me. Every tree had the thing my spirit didn't have: calm.

I waited for the person I was pining for to call me, but my phone stayed silent. I grew sick with the famous feeling called heartbreak, which resembles death in life.

My familiar, ordinary language seemed to abandon the hand I write with. The underworld ghosts in Homer's epic poems and the conch shells on the shore (which seem to hold the ocean's primitive roar) were unavailable to my imagination.

Suddenly, the sky addressed me in plain language, which felt as recognizable as my own heart and more intimate than love. The sky told my spirit: "You already have everything you want.

"Understand that you're as old as the clouds, wind, stars, unresting oceans, and woodland creatures. Their nature is the same as your own.

"Heal your heart and have courage. Whether you're dead in the grave or alive and breathing, you're connected to everything in this world, from flowers to tigers."

After the sky spoke, everything in sight looked divine and eternal, and every new cell in nature blazed with a passionate, sacred fire.

I had a vision of the world as it would be on the biblical Day of Judgment, when the war in heaven ends, the sky vanishes, and everything turns into immortal light and love.

THEMES

HEARTBREAK AND HEALING

Kathleen Raine's "Passion" illustrates the world-stopping pain of heartbreak—but it also argues that such agony doesn't last forever. The poem's speaker is grieving some lost love, the pain of which makes them feel utterly isolated from the rest of the world: the clouds sail past without the speaker, and the trees possess a "tranquility," or sense of peace, that the speaker's miserable soul "lack[s]." Waiting for an implied ex-lover to call on the "telephone," they explain that their "body grew weak / With the well-known and mortal death, heartbreak." In other words, they're so depressed and lonely that they feel like the living dead. They're so shattered that their "human speech" seems to have deserted them; they can't even *articulate* their despair, so painful is this heartache.

Soon enough, however, the "sky" comforts the speaker by reminding them that they already have what they "desire" (implicitly, love and connection) because they "share" the world with every other creature in it. The speaker was "born along with" those same "clouds" that earlier appeared to pass them by; the speaker is as much a part of nature as the "winds," "stars, and ever-moving seas." The sharp, isolating pain of lost love dulls when one realizes that they're never actually alone—in fact, quite the opposite. The sky thus instructs the speaker to "Lift up your heart again without fear." Heartbreak is temporary, the speaker realizes, and understanding one's connection to the rest of creation can help people open their hearts to love again.

Absorbing this revelation, the speaker no longer misses their old, passionate relationship. In fact, they discover an equally intense "passion" in all the life around them. (Here, the word "passion" has not only romantic but religious overtones; in the Christian tradition, it's associated with Christ's martyrdom on behalf of humanity.) In this way, the poem draws an implied analogy between healing from "heartbreak" and having one's "death" redeemed by eternal life. Both, the speaker suggests, require an escape from one's petty personal troubles into an awareness of one's place in the larger universe. By narrating the speaker's healing, the poem offers comfort to sad or lonely readers, just as the sky offers comfort to the speaker. It suggests that even the worst heartbreak and loneliness will pass.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-24

UNITY WITH NATURE AND GOD

"Passion" begins with its speaker, reeling from a recent heartbreak, feeling deeply alienated from the world around them. Yet the "sky" comforts the speaker by assuring them that they're inherently part of nature, and thus that they're never alone. What's more, the poem suggests that this connection with nature connects people to "eternity"—that is, to *God*—because nature and "eternity" are in fact the same thing.

The speaker at first feels completely at odds with the world outside. The sky seems to "wound[]" the speaker, the "cloud[s]" seem to have abandoned them, and the "tree[s]" seem to possess a "tranquillity" that the speaker's "soul" craves. It's as though nature's calm is mocking the speaker's turmoil. What lifts the speaker's spirits is the realization that their alienation is an illusion, because everything in nature, including humans, is connected to everything else. A voice from the

"sky"—apparently the voice of nature and/or God—tells the speaker that they were "born" along with the "Clouds, winds, and stars," as well as the "ever-moving seas" and "forest dwell[ing]" creatures. Indeed, the speaker shares "This world [...] with the flower and with the tiger"; they're connected even to the most distant and dissimilar creatures.

Having received the sky's message, the speaker suddenly perceives everything "visible" around them as "immortal." Each "cell new born" seems filled with "the holy fire of passion": even the tiniest living thing in nature reveals itself to be divine. The world is full of God's passion and glory, and even a single cell is part of that eternal creation. The speaker's connection to nature does more than soothe the pain of a particular heartache: it reminds the speaker that their soul is interwoven with eternity itself.

Newly hopeful, the speaker envisions a time "When the war ends"—alluding to the war in heaven in the biblical Book of Revelation, but also suggesting a time when earthly troubles, including their own inner conflicts, are over. The speaker also envisions the sky that had initially seemed so hurtful and alienating "roll[ing] away" to reveal "light, love and eternity." People can find solace, the poem suggests, in recognizing their place amid God's loving, divine, and "immortal" creation.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-24

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-6

Full of desire ...
... mortal death, heartbreak.

The poem begins with its speaker recalling a low point in their life. The speaker is never named or gendered: they might be a stand-in for the poet or a separate persona entirely.

The speaker recalls lying down somewhere indoors, "Full of desire" for some unnamed person or thing. As they watch the scene outdoors, presumably through a window, they take no comfort from anything in nature.

In fact, nature seems hostile, mocking, and superior. The speaker recalls "the sky wounding me" in some metaphorical way—perhaps with its piercing brightness, perhaps with its cold indifference. Meanwhile, "Each cloud" in that sky reminds the speaker of "a ship without me sailing"; in other words, it makes the speaker feel abandoned, or as if they're missing out on some grand adventure. "Each tree" in the landscape seems to "Possess[]" what the speaker's "soul lack[s]," and wishes for most: "tranquillity." In other words, while the speaker's in turmoil, the trees seem calmly at ease.

This attribution of human feelings to nature is called the pathetic fallacy, and it's an early example of the speaker's tendency to personify or anthropomorphize the natural world around them. Even when they feel alone and detached from nature, as they do here, they view nature as remarkably human.

The second stanza reveals the root cause of all this distress: "heartbreak." The speaker has been through a breakup and isn't over their ex. They find themselves in a classic post-breakup situation: "Waiting for the longed-for voice to speak / Through the mute telephone." Of course, the call never comes, and the speaker's "body" feels "weak" with "heartbreak"—which they call "the well-known and mortal death." That is, heartbreak is an old and storied feeling, and it feels like death in life.

These first six lines establish the form that the rest of the poem will follow: tercet stanzas rhyming AAA, BBB, and so on. The consistent structure gives the poem a balanced, harmonious quality, while the consistent end-stopping of stanzas (all end with periods) gives it a stately, measured pace. These qualities are at odds with the speaker's initial turmoil, but they suit what will be the dominant mood of the poem: confident, "Passion[ate]" appreciation for the world.

LINES 7-9

The language I ...
... of the beach.

Lines 7-9 continue to describe the effects of the speaker's "heartbreak." First, they recount an experience that sounds very much like writer's block: "The language I knew best, my human speech / Forsook my fingers." This metaphor contains a surprise twist, as one would normally expect "speech" to come from the mouth, not the "fingers." But it's the speaker's *writing* hand that speech "Forsook," or abandoned. If this is the voice of the poet herself, the speaker may be saying that heartbreak left her unable to write poems.

Notice that this is also a metaphor of abandonment, which subtly echoes the earlier comparison of clouds to "ship[s] without me sailing." Abandoned by their ex, the speaker seems to feel that the natural world outside *and* their own internal writing voice have abandoned them as well.

Similarly, the following lines suggest that both literature and nature feel remote and unavailable. "Homer's ghosts"—an allusion to the underworld spirits in Homer's epic poem the *Odyssey*, or perhaps all the invented characters in Homer's work—seem to be "out of reach." So do "the savage conches of the beach" (the rough, wild conch shells on the seashore).

In the literal sense, the speaker might mean that neither of these things is at hand (i.e., the speaker is physically distant from their books and the beach). Figuratively, the speaker implies that these things don't *inspire* or *communicate* anything to them, and by extension, neither do literature or nature as a whole. The inspiration these things once held feels far away, as

if trapped in an inaccessible afterlife or strewn on some exotic shore.

Recall that, according to folk tradition, one can hear the voice of the ocean if one holds a conch shell up to one's ear. That voice—or "savage" roar—seems to have fallen silent for the speaker, as have the ghostly voices of classic literature. Holed up in their room, the speaker feels utterly deserted and alone.

LINES 10-15

Then the sky ...
... your nature is.

In lines 10-15, things begin to turn around for the heartbroken speaker. And no wonder: the "sky" itself starts comforting them personally! Whereas previously the sky had "wound[ed]" them (line 1)—through its indifference to their heartbreak, perhaps, or through weather that mirrored or clashed with it—the anthropomorphic voice of the sky now reassures the speaker "in language clear."

Notice that this is the poem's second mention of "language." Previously, the speaker's own writerly language had abandoned them; they felt unable to articulate their stormy emotions (lines 7-8). Now, with this repetition, language has returned—in the form of a voice from the heavens. This seems to be the voice of God, or maybe Mother Nature.

In a pair of similes, the speaker calls the sky's language "Familiar as the heart, than love more near." In other words, its words are intimate, tender, and instantly comprehensible. Because the voice comes from a place "near[er]" than "the heart," it might even be interpreted as some *internal* voice that the speaker externalizes and projects onto the heavens.

Regardless, the voice directly addresses the speaker's "soul." To this heartbroken person who has been tormented by "desire" (line 1), it brings the surprising message: "You have what you desire." Since this statement can't be true in the expected sense—the speaker's lover hasn't returned—it must mean that the speaker *really* desires something else, something larger.

That something turns out to be a form of connection deeper than ordinary romance. In mystical tones, the sky tells the speaker's "soul" that "you [were] born along with these / Clouds, winds, and stars, and ever-moving seas / And forest dwellers." That is, the speaker's body may be young, but their soul is as ancient as the sky itself—along with the "seas" and the creatures of the "forest." In fact, their soul is deeply connected with all these things; it was "born" as one with the rest of nature. To drive the point home, the voice adds: "This your nature is."

These statements indicate that the speaker's individual self (or human nature) is part of the vast tapestry of the natural world. And since this is true (the poem implies), how can the speaker possibly be alone? Why should they wait for a connection via "telephone" when connection is all around them? The speaker is hearing a voice directly *from nature*, after all, so they can't really be as alone as they felt in the opening stanzas. After the speaker's heartbreak, the consoling words of the sky—whether real or imagined—represent the beginning of healing.

LINES 16-21

Lift up your ...
... fire of passion.

In lines 16-18, the sky continues to comfort the speaker. Its divine-sounding voice urges: "Lift up your heart again without fear." Since the speaker has been nursing a heartbeak, this seems to mean, *Have the courage to love again*. (Or, as one might say to a friend who's been burned on the dating scene, *Put yourself back out there*.) At the very least, it's a call to gather strength and move on.

The sky then offers another mystical statement, this one tinged with symbolism:

> Sleep in the tomb, or breathe the living air,
> This world you with the flower and with the tiger
> share.'

Though the grammar here is ambiguous, there seems to be an implied "Whether you" before "Sleep." In other words, the sky probably isn't saying: *Die or live, your choice*. Instead, it's saying, *Whether you die or live*, and so on. According to the sky, then, whether the speaker is dead in the "tomb" or alive and "breath[ing]," they will still "share" the "world" with both "the flower" and "the tiger." They will still be connected to all living creatures, from the most common and fragile (represented by the flower) to the most exotic and powerful (the tiger). They can never be alone, even in death.

After receiving this message, the speaker has a spiritual vision in lines 19-21. They behold "every visible substance turn / Into immortal"; that is, they discover that the world of seemingly temporary things around them is in fact eternal and indestructible. They also perceive that "every cell new born" around them—even the newest and tiniest vehicles of life—"Burn[s] with the holy fire of passion." Every living thing seems sacred, ablaze with the glory of God, right down to the cellular level. "Passion" here means what it usually does (intense emotion or sensual feeling), but given the spiritual intensity of Raine's language, it might also allude to the Passion of Jesus (his martyrdom and crucifixion). All of nature seems as "holy" to the speaker as Jesus on the cross.

And so, having been comforted by the mystical voice from above, the speaker is no longer heartbroken. Just the opposite: they now view everything around them as beautiful and revelatory.

LINES 22-24

This world I ...

... love and eternity.

Lines 22-24 close out the poem with a religious (specifically, Christian) vision. The speaker uses a simile to describe their new, mystical perception of the world:

> This world I saw as on her judgment day
> When the war ends, and the sky rolls away,
> And all is light, love and eternity.

These lines allude to the Book of Revelation (a.k.a. the Apocalypse of John), the final book of the Bible. Revelation is a prophecy describing the end of the world, including "judgment day" or the Last Judgment, which ushers in the final salvation of the virtuous and the final punishment of the damned. Raine draws her images directly from various chapters of Revelation; for example, "the sky rolls away" echoes Revelation 6 (quoted here in the King James Version):

> [14] And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

"The war ends" might echo Revelation 12, in which the angels of heaven battle "the dragon," Satan:

> [7] And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,
> [8] And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

"The war ends" also evokes Revelation 20, in which Satan loses again:

> [7] And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,
> [8] And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.
> [9] And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.
> [10] And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone [...]

Finally, "all is light, love and eternity" evokes the "new Jerusalem" or holy city God establishes after the Last Judgment. This city is a place of eternal peace and light, as described in Revelation 22:

> [5] And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

Remember that all of this is a simile: the speaker isn't literally having a hallucination of the new Jerusalem. Rather, the world now *appears* beautiful and paradise-like to their freshly opened eyes. Still, it's implied that there's a fundamental truth to their vision. Having realized their profound connection with nature and the universe, they're immersed in a higher "love" that transcends any human heartbreak.

SYMBOLS

THE CONCHES

In the depths of "heartbreak," the speaker feels that "the savage conches of the beach" (along with "Homer's ghosts," or the underworld spirits of Greek myth) are "out of reach." Beaches are often associated with peace and relaxation, so it's possible the speaker means that peace of mind eludes them; they can't relax among the seashells, either literally or imaginatively.

However, the word "savage" (wild, rough, close to nature) points in another direction, as does the overall context of the statement. The speaker has just mentioned that their own "language" seems to have abandoned them, along with the wisdom of literature, represented by "Homer's ghosts." In other words, they're suffering from writer's block and can't seem to find meaning in their reading.

As such, the "savage conches of the beach" might symbolize another voice they can't get in touch with: the voice of nature. After all, folk tradition says that conch shells contain the sound of the ocean in their hollows. That these shells are symbolically "out of reach" suggests that the speaker can't find harmony with (or meaning in) nature, any more than they can in writing or books.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 8-9:** "and out of reach / Were Homer's ghosts, the savage conches of the beach."

THE FLOWER AND THE TIGER

The sky's message to the speaker includes the insight: "This world you with the flower and with the tiger share." Both the flower and tiger have symbolic meanings here: they represent tameness and delicacy on the one hand, savagery and strength on the other. Both are generally considered beautiful, but in drastically different ways. The

point, then, is that the speaker is connected with all of nature, including beautiful creatures great and small.

For an English poet like Raine, a tiger would also be considered an exotic animal (it's native to Asia), whereas flowers are common and close at hand. So the sky's message might also imply that the speaker is connected to creatures near and far.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 18:** "This world you with the flower and with the tiger share.'"

POETIC DEVICES

ANTHROPOMORPHISM

The speaker projects their emotions onto their natural surroundings in the poem's first stanza. For example, the speaker says that the trees possess a "tranquillity" that the speaker's own "soul lack[s]." This is a pretty clear example of pathetic fallacy, as trees can be *physically* motionless but not *spiritually* "tranquil[]." Similarly, the speaker imagines "the sky" as metaphorically "wounding" them in what seems to be a cruel, *personal* way. The sky isn't capable of deliberately hurting the speaker, nor can it feel vindictiveness or cruelty.

This pathetic fallacy illustrates how the speaker is feeling. Reeling from heartbreak, the speaker perceives hostility in the sky above and laments that the trees seem so happy and at ease. On the one hand, then, pathetic fallacy highlights the speaker's initial sense of separation from their surroundings. Notice, however, that even when the speaker claims to feel totally disconnected from nature, they imagine natural things as human-like—hinting that they have something in common with nature after all.

Where Anthropomorphism appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "the sky wounding me"
- **Lines 2-3:** "each tree / Possessing what my soul lacked, tranquillity"

REPETITION

In the first stanza, the speaker's declaration that the sky wounds them is an example of pathetic fallacy: the speaker is projecting their own hurt onto their natural surroundings. Yet as the poem goes on, the sky comes to life as an actual character in the poem. This anthropomorphism underscores one of the poem's main themes: the unity between humanity and nature.

The sky addresses the speaker "in language clear," providing spiritual counsel and reassurance. The reader might reasonably assume this is supposed to be the voice of God, but importantly, the speaker never uses the *word* God. Instead, they ascribe the reassurance to the "sky" itself, to nature.

The direct communication here—the speaker's environment talking "clear[ly]" to the speaker—drives home the idea that divisions between humanity and the natural world are false. The "nature" of "Clouds," "winds," "stars," etc. is our nature, too.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Lines 10-18:** "Then the sky spoke to me in language clear, / Familiar as the heart, than love more near. / The sky said to my soul, 'You have what you desire. / 'Know now that you are born along with these / Clouds, winds, and stars, and ever-moving seas / And forest dwellers. This your nature is. / Lift up your heart again without fear, / Sleep in the tomb, or breathe the living air, / This world you with the flower and with the tiger share.'"

ALLUSION

The poem alludes both to the epic poet Homer and to the Bible, particularly the Book of Revelation. The first allusion comes in lines 8-9, as the speaker describes their period of "heartbreak":

> [...] and out of reach
> Were Homer's ghosts, the savage conches of the beach.

The speaker makes this statement right after describing their writer's block, during which "my human speech / Forsook my fingers." The allusion implies, then, that books and literature, such as the works of Homer, felt remote and inaccessible during the same period. "Homer's ghosts" likely refers to the underworld spirits Odysseus visits in the eleventh book of Homer's *Odyssey*, so the allusion might further imply that the voices of the dead (including dead authors and characters) offered the speaker no comfort.

Later, the speaker perceives the entire natural world as lit by "the holy fire of passion." The word "passion" can be read literally here, but in this "holy" context, it probably also alludes to the biblical "passion" of Jesus, meaning his suffering before and during the Crucifixion (for example, see Acts 1:3: "To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs [...]").

The nod to Jesus's martyrdom, and the suggestion that all of nature is "Burn[ing]" with his glory, helps set up the more explicit Christian references in the final stanza:

> This world I saw as on her judgment day
> When the war ends, and the sky rolls away,
> And all is light, love and eternity.

"The war" refers to the "war in heaven" in Revelation, during

which God's angels cast Satan out of heaven and into hell (Revelation 12:7-12), or to the "battle" Satan stokes among the nations of the earth after escaping his "prison" (Rev. 20:7-8). The apocalyptic image of "the sky roll[ing] away" invokes Revelation 6:14: "And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together."

Finally, the vision of "light, love and eternity" echoes the description of the holy city or "new Jerusalem" at the end of Revelation (as in Rev. 22:5: "And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever"). Basically, the speaker is adapting Christian iconography to their own vision of eternal peace—of an end to all "war[s]" and troubles, including the speaker's own.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Lines 8-9:** "and out of reach / Were Homer's ghosts,"
- **Lines 20-24:** "every cell new born / Burned with the holy fire of passion. / This world I saw as on her judgment day / When the war ends, and the sky rolls away, / And all is light, love and eternity."

SIMILE

The poem's similes help illustrate the speaker's turn from heartbreak to joy. First, there's the double simile in lines 10-11:

> Then the sky spoke to me in language clear,
> Familiar as the heart, than love more near.

This comparison highlights the gentleness and intimacy of the sky's speech. Rather than being awed, terrified, confused, etc., the speaker is *reassured* by the "language" and tones the sky uses to address them. This seems to be the voice of a loving God or benevolent universe.

After the sky's revelation, the speaker compares the "world" around them to a biblical scene from the *Book* of Revelation:

> This world I saw as on her judgment day
> When the war ends, and the sky rolls away,
> And all is light, love and eternity.

"Judgment day" might sound foreboding, but once again, the comparison turns out to be joyful and redemptive. This image describes the Christian apocalypse after all the bad stuff—war, punishment of the damned, etc.—is over, and eternal peace has arrived. Of course, the speaker isn't literally watching the "sky roll[] away" around her, like the heavens rolling up into a scroll in Revelation. Rather, they *feel* as much as peace with "This world" as they would if paradise had come to earth.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 10-11:** "Then the sky spoke to me in language clear, / Familiar as the heart, than love more near."
- **Lines 22-24:** "This world I saw as on her judgment day / When the war ends, and the sky rolls away, / And all is light, love and eternity."

END-STOPPED LINE

The majority of the poem's lines are end-stopped; only 10 of 24 are enjambed (though one, line 7, would be end-stopped with a comma under normal punctuation rules). The frequent stops lend the poem a slow and stately rhythm, appropriate to a spiritual meditation.

More notably, every single stanza is end-stopped with a period. This effect slows the poem's pace even further, while also giving each stanza a self-contained quality. In fact, nearly every stanza consists of a single sentence (with the exception of the fourth stanza, which contains two). So the speaker's meditation is blocked out in short, cohesive units of thought, each of which allows the reader a brief pause to digest before moving on.

Broadly, all this end-stopping gives the poem an orderly, harmonious structure, which seems to reflect the speaker's state of mind at the *end* of the poem rather than the beginning. Even when describing their initial "heartbreak," the speaker maintains an even, predictable pace—suggesting that, psychologically, they have fully gotten over the pain. By contrast, a more heavily enjambed, rhythmically erratic poem would likely suggest some lingering turmoil in their heart.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- Line 1
- Line 3
- Line 6
- Line 9
- Lines 10-12
- Line 15
- Lines 16-18
- Line 21
- Lines 23-24

REPETITION

Occasional repetition intensifies the speaker's language. Notice, for example, the anaphora of "each" in line 2:

> Each cloud a ship without me sailing, each tree
> Possessing what my soul lacked, tranquillity. [...]

This anaphora hammers home the speaker's heartache. They feel like each and every bit of nature is moving along without them. The repetition in lines 19-20 has a similar effect in terms of making the speaker's language sound more emphatic and,

indeed, passionate:

> Then I saw **every** visible substance turn
> Into immortal, **every** cell new born
> Burned with the holy fire of passion.

The diacope of "every" captures the speaker's newfound sense of overwhelming joy. Whereas before it seemed like the whole world threw the speaker's pain into starker relief, "every" bit of the world fuels their happiness.

The poem also repeats numerous words and phrases, several of which are central to its narrative and themes: for example, "the sky," "my soul," and "language." The first two of these are especially key, as the poem portrays a communion, or one-way communication, between nature's "sky" and the speaker's "soul." The sky reassures the speaker that, far from being alone in their misery, they're part of the vast tapestry of nature, which is "immortal." But in a subtle way, "language" is also crucial to the story. Though the speaker's powers of "speech" and writing had initially abandoned them, it's implied that, thanks to the sky's reassurance, they've recovered their eloquence. In other words, they've cheered up and written this poem.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "the sky"
- **Line 2:** "Each," "each"
- **Line 3:** "my soul"
- **Line 7:** "language"
- **Line 10:** "the sky," "language"
- **Line 12:** "The sky," "my soul"
- **Line 19:** "every"
- **Line 20:** "every"
- **Line 23:** "the sky"

VOCABULARY

Tranquillity (Line 3) - Calm; serenity.

Forsook (Lines 7-8) - Abandoned or departed. "My human speech / Forsook my fingers" is a metaphor indicating that the speaker had writer's block; the power of language seemed to leave the hand(s) she wrote with.

Conches (Lines 8-9) - Conch shells: large seashells sometimes used as musical instruments. According to folk belief, one can hear the sound of the ocean (actually the reverberation of ambient sounds and the ear's own blood flow) in the conch's hollow cavity.

Homer's ghosts (Lines 8-9) - Refers to the ghosts or "shades" that populate the underworld in Greek myth. They appear in Book 11 of Homer's *Odyssey*.

Forest dwellers (Lines 14-15) - Creatures that live in the woods.

Passion (Lines 20-21) - Mainly means "intense feeling," but in this context, also alludes to the "passion" of Jesus (his suffering before and during the Crucifixion). The second meaning reinforces the idea that all of nature is "holy."

Judgment day (Line 22) - The Last Judgment, an apocalyptic story found in the Abrahamic religions. In the Christian tradition, Judgment Day follows the Second Coming of Jesus and brings the final salvation of the virtuous and the final damnation of the wicked.

The war (Line 23) - Alludes to the "war in heaven" in the biblical Book of Revelation, which ends with Satan being cast out of heaven (see Revelation 12:7-12). Likewise, "the sky rolls away" alludes to another line from the same book: "And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places" (Revelation 6:14).

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Passion" consists of eight three-line stanzas, or tercets. The three lines of each stanza rhyme with one another; some rhymes are exact and others are slant. This structure creates an overall sense of order and harmony, in keeping with the poem's message about the unity of humanity, nature, and God.

In the Western poetic tradition, rhymed tercets are most famously associated with Dante's *Divine Comedy*, whose speaker journeys from hell (the *Inferno*) to heaven (the *Paradiso*). Although "Passion" doesn't use Dante's rhyme scheme (terza rima), it does use a meter (loose iambic pentameter) that's similar to Dante's 11-syllable lines. In other words, Raine may have meant the poem's form to echo Dante's poem in a faint, subtle way. "Passion," too, traces a (much briefer!) spiritual journey from something like despair toward the "light" of faith and hope.

METER

The poem uses a loose iambic pentameter, meaning its lines contain 10 syllables arranged in a da-DUM, da-DUM rhythm. There are many exceptions throughout the poem, however. For example, line 1 has six strong **stresses** and an irregular rhythm:

> Full of | de**sire** | I **lay**, | the **sky** | **woun**ding | **me**,

In fact, while line 4 comes close, the first example of perfect iambic pentameter doesn't arrive until line 7:

> The **lan**- | guage I | knew **best**, | my **hu**- | man **speech**

The meter becomes a little more settled in the second half of the poem, perhaps reflecting the inner "tranquillity" the speaker regains. But the meter never becomes *totally* regular—maybe because the speaker also regains a sense of "passion," which rebels against strict structures (such as the "cell[s]" of living creatures). In general, the poet's handling of meter feels less rule-determined than intuitive and organic, in keeping with the poem's vision of harmony with nature.

RHYME SCHEME

Each of the poem's stanzas contains three lines that rhyme with each other. The poem's rhyme scheme is thus AAA BBB CCC (and so on).

Some of these rhymes are exact ("me"/"tree"/"tranquillity" in the first stanza), while others are slant rhymes ("turn"/"born"/"passion," lines 19-21). The poem's mix of perfect and imperfect rhymes gives its structure a little flexibility, just as its loose iambic meter does. As a result, the poem flows organically (rather than strictly following rules), but still sounds lush and harmonious—a good blend for a poem about finding harmony with the natural world.

SPEAKER

The poem's first-person speaker is never named, and their age, gender, nationality, etc. are never revealed. They are probably meant to be the voice of Kathleen Raine herself, but nothing in the poem specifically links the poet and speaker. As a result, they come off as a kind of Everyperson, easy for any reader to identify with.

Similarly, the speaker's situation is fairly generic. They have experienced some kind of "heartbreak" that has left their "soul" in turmoil. They are "Waiting" by the phone for a call, presumably from their ex-lover, but the phone remains "mute." In the meantime, they are experiencing writer's block—"speech" has deserted the "fingers" they write with—and imaginative frustration. The voices of "Homer's ghosts" (the underworld spirits depicted in Homer's *Odyssey*) and the "conch[]" shells on the seashore (which are sometimes said to contain the "voice" of the ocean) seem equally "out of reach." The speaker feels cut off from both literature and nature, and from any source of meaning or comfort.

Suddenly, they experience a revelation that arrives as a voice from the "sky." This appears to represent the voice of nature, God, or both. The voice tells them that they are connected to all things—they are not alone—and encourages them to love again: to "Lift up your heart again without fear." The speaker's sense of "passion" and faith in God/nature/the universe is restored.

SETTING

"Passion" seems to take place indoors, even as its speaker mainly focuses on the world outside. The poem begins with the speaker lying down (perhaps in bed), full of pain and longing, staring out the window at the "sky," "cloud[s]," and "tree[s]." The speaker is "Waiting" for a phone call from a "longed-for voice"—the voice of a former lover—but the call never comes.

As the poem goes on, the indoor scene fades into the background, and the speaker concentrates solely on the outdoor scene. Their imagination ranges from the "ever-moving seas / And forest dwellers" to the "tiger[s]" of faraway lands. This shift mirrors the speaker's emotional shift from loneliness and alienation to a sense of deep connection with the entire natural world.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Kathleen Raine (1908-2003) was an English poet, scholar, and memoirist. "Passion" appears in her first poetry collection, *Stone and Flower*, published in 1943 alongside illustrations by the artist Barbara Hepworth.

Raine's work is generally meditative and spiritual, drawing on elements of Christian mysticism, Neoplatonist philosophy, and the psychological theories of Carl Jung. "Passion," for example, includes references to the apocalyptic "judgment day" from the biblical Book of Revelation.

Raine's scholarship centered on the British Romantic poet William Blake (1757-1827), an intense, spiritually driven writer and a clear influence on Raine's poetry. (The "tiger" in line 18 might be read as a Blakean touch, since "The Tyger" is one of Blake's most famous poems.) Indeed, much of Raine's poetry features a lyrical appreciation of nature's beauty and divinity that draws from the Romantic tradition.

Among her contemporaries, Raine was linked to the writers Philip Sherrard, Keith Critchlow, and Brian Keeble, with whom she co-founded the literary magazine *Temenos* and the Temenos Academy in London (see below). A long-lived and much-decorated poet, her honors included the Queen's Gold Medal for Literature.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"Passion" doesn't make any direct reference to historical events. It focuses on a timeless, generic natural landscape of "sky," "tree[s]," etc., in keeping with its emphasis on "immortal[ity]" and "eternity." A flurry of topical references would likely undercut the poem's core message: namely, that everything in the human and natural worlds is part of an ancient, eternal web of being. Still, it's clear that the poem takes

place in relatively modern times, since the speaker is in the familiar situation of "Waiting" by the "telephone." (Home telephones didn't become common until the early decades of the 20th century.)

Raine was 35 years old when she published the collection in which "Passion" appears, and she had by all accounts already experienced plenty of passion and heartache herself. By this time, she had also ended her unhappy marriage to her first husband and married her second.

In this poem and others from *Stone and Flower*, Raine also begins to develop the spiritual ideas that, in later life, prompted her to co-found the Temenos Academy of Integral Studies. This small institution bills itself as "an educational charity which offers education in philosophy and the arts in the light of the sacred traditions of East and West."

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- The Poet's Life — Read a short biography of Kathleen Raine via the Poetry Foundation. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/kathleen-raine)
- More on Raine's Life and Work — Raine's 2003 obituary in the Guardian. (https://www.theguardian.com/news/2003/jul/08/guardianobituaries.books)
- The Poet Lectures — Listen to four of Raine's lectures on poetry and the imagination. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJhskHNILK4)
- Raine and Temenos Academy — Information on the spiritual/philosophical academy Raine founded. (https://www.temenosacademy.org/kathleen-raine/)
- An Interview with the Poet — Watch a late-life interview with Kathleen Raine. (https://archive.org/details/dni.ncaa.IGNCA-483-UM)

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