Remember Study Guide

Remember by Christina Rossetti

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Introduction

When the sonnet "Remember" first appeared in *"Goblin Market" and Other Poems* in 1862, it was both warmly and sadly received by readers. A mixture of happiness and depression tends to run throughout many of Christina Rossetti's poems, and this one, which begins "Remember me when I am gone away," implies immediately a loving, yet sad, request. How Rossetti resolves the conflict she presents in the poem reflects the way she handled similar dilemmas in her own life—emotionally and philosophically, always letting her devout Christian beliefs be the deciding factor.

Whether it was her struggle with debilitating illnesses or a desire to meet her maker, Rossetti appears to have been obsessed with her own pending death. "Remember" couples this persistent thought with an awkward love affair, one in which the speaker, presumably the poet herself, confesses that she may not be as passionately in love with her suitor as he is with her. But since she believes she is going to die anyway, her ambivalence toward him is not the most important issue. Instead, the dominant concern becomes how he will remember her when she is gone. Will he think of her and recall the pain of not knowing whether she truly loved him or will he remember, rightly or wrongly, that she adored him as much as he adored her?

In his book, *Christina Rossetti in Context*, author Antony H. Harrison discusses the poet's work and the "dominant tensions upon which it is constructed: between beauty and death; between love of man and love of God; between the ephemeral and the eternal; between the sensory and the transcendent." "Remember" is very much concerned with these tensions, especially those between the ephemeral, or short-lived, and the eternal and between beauty and death, which the poet seems often to confuse in her work as well as in her life.

Author Biography

Christina Rossetti was born in London, England, in December 1830 and died in London in December 1894. Although she was of Italian descent, Rossetti never lived outside Great Britain because her father had moved to London where he was a professor of Italian at King's College. Rossetti's mother was also a teacher, and she schooled her own children at home. All four Rossetti children were artistically inclined□the two sons, William Michael and Dante Gabriel, were poets and painters; the older daughter, Maria, was a writer; and the youngest, Christina, became one of Victorian England's most prominent poets of both adult and children's verse.

Her brother, Dante Gabriel, probably had the greatest influence on Rossetti's early work. Dante was one of the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, an artistic group whose objective was to recapture the more natural creative spirit of art before the renowned Renaissance painter Raphael (1483- 1520) suggested restrictions on how a painting "should" look. When Dante started the Pre- Raphaelite movement in 1848, he and other members declined to attend any formal classes, essentially snubbing the Royal Academy and the fine-tuned artists it turned out. He also started a Pre-Raphaelite journal called The Germ, and this journal is where Rossetti published many of her first poems. Her first book, *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, was a collection of both adult and children's verse published in 1862. It includes the sonnet "Remember." Its symbolism and religious allegories are evidence of the Pre-Raphaelite influence on her work.

In spite of her association with this artistic movement of the mid-nineteenth century, Rossetti's life was governed more by her strict religious beliefs than by poetry, paintings, or famous siblings. She was a devout member of the Anglican Church, and she turned down two marriage proposals because the would-be husbands did not share her faith. Although she had apparently fallen in love both times, Rossetti declined her first suitor's proposal because he became a Roman Catholic and the second because he claimed to follow no faith at all. As a result, she remained single all her life. The tension brought about by conflicts between loving a man and loving God haunted Rossetti continuously. It is a theme played out in much of her poetry, including the sonnet sequence "Monna Innominata" (Unnamed Lady), which appears in *A Pageant and Other Poems*, published in 1881. At that point, the poet was in ill health and turning more toward writing religious essays than verse. Many of Rossetti's sonnets portray her consistent belief that she was close to death, and "Remember" is an excellent example of this belief.

Poem Text

Remember me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land;
When you can no more hold me by the hand,
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.
Remember me when no more day by day
You tell me of our future that you planned:
Only remember me; you understand
It will be late to counsel then or pray.
Yet if you should forget me for a while
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:
For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,
Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad.

Plot Summary

Lines 1-2

The opening two lines of Rossetti's sonnet "Remember" introduce the idea of separation, but whether the speaker's eminent departure is because she has chosen to leave her lover or because she is dying is not immediately clear. As the poem unfolds, the reader understands that death will divide the couple, and the initial hint of that is the phrase "silent land" to describe the place the speaker is going. The words seem to define a cemetery or individual grave more than heaven, and "silent," in particular, implies a dormant state—an existence and a place that are neither joyous nor painful, pleasant nor sad. The opening lines also portray the speaker's desire to be remembered, and she requests her lover to do just that. This request will become more significant at the end of the poem when the dying woman appears to do an about-face with what she asks of him.

Lines 3-4

Line 3 simply furthers the idea of the couple's time together coming to an end, describing their physical separation when death will remove her from his touch. Line 4, however, presents an interesting twist in the situation. If Rossetti is writing only about the sadness of a loving man and woman being torn apart by one's actual death, then the woman—the one dying—would not have the option of turning "to go yet turning stay." The implication here is that the death theme is not the only one at work. Caught between two opposites, going and staying, the speaker reveals her uncertainty in whether she really loves the man to whom she is speaking. Her unsure feelings become clearer in the latter part of the poem.

Lines 5-6

In line 5, the woman once again requests that her lover remember her "when no more day by day" he can talk to her about the future he was planning for the both of them. Notice here that the speaker says "*our* future that *you* planned," implying that she may not have given as much thought to staying together for the rest of their lives as he had.

Lines 7-8

These are the last two lines of the "octave," or a sonnet's first eight lines that generally follow a specific rhyme scheme and present a question or dilemma to be resolved in the "sestet," or final six lines. This poem's resolution—if there is one—is not quite as satisfying or conclusive as most. Lines 7 and 8 present the third time the speaker uses the word "remember," and it seems almost like a plea now. She essentially tells her

lover that the only way to keep her with him is in his memory because, as her death approaches, it will be too late to discuss or pray about anything.

Lines 9-10

The beginning of the sestet is also the beginning of the about-face in the speaker's instructions to her lover. For the first time, she uses the word "forget," obviously the opposite of everything she has said to this point. Now she admits the possibility that the memory of her may slip from the man's mind from time to time, and she tells him not to worry about this or "grieve" over it. Suddenly, she seems more realistic about their relationship and the likelihood that her lover will go on with his own life, not dwelling on the memory of a woman he once had and lost.

Lines 11-12

In these lines, the speaker explains why she has granted permission for her lover to forget her as well as remember her. The revelation here is further evidence that the woman has had doubts about her love for this man throughout their relationship. She acknowledges that her death will leave "darkness and corruption" in his life, and that in this state of grief, he may actually recall the bad as well as the good. That is, he may remember that the thoughts the woman once had were about leaving him, ending their relationship before death had the chance to end it. A "vestige," or trace, of the doubt she sometimes felt would only bring him pain in remembering her after she is dead. With that in mind, the woman comes to the conclusion that she reveals in the final two lines of the sonnet.

Lines 13-14

Lines 13 and 14 present what feminist writer and critic Dolores Rosenblum calls an "equipoise," or an equilibrium as a means of resolution. In *Christina Rossetti: The Poetry of Endurance*, Rosenblum states:

> the young poet has already grasped the possibilities
> of the valediction of holding opposites in balance, for
> keeping and letting go. . . . If opposites cannot be reconciled,
> if self-division cannot be healed, then at least
> one can imagine the perfect equipoise.

The decision, or balance, in "Remember" is that it is better for the man to forget his dead lover if remembering her will only bring him pain. Keep in mind that it is not the normal pain that comes along with grieving for a lost loved one that the speaker wants him to avoid. Rather, it is the pain of remembering that she may not have really loved him, and their relationship would not have been a lifelong one even if she had lived into old age.

Themes

Imperfect Love

The theme of imperfect love in Rossetti's "Remember" is an idea based on the more obvious and often used theme of religion in her work. To a poet so devoutly centered on her Christian faith and love of God, the love of a man must seem second-rate, at best. A question, therefore, arises about her sincerity in the relationship she has with her lover— on one hand, she seems honestly to love him and begs him to remember her when she is dead; on the other hand, she appears a bit nonchalant in her willingness to tell him to forget her just the same.

In the beginning of the poem, the love between the couple seems strong, and the overtone of sadness and grief stems from the notion that death is about to tear them apart. But is this notion a fact? Is the woman really dying and, if so, how much time does she have left—a few hours, a few weeks, a year? There is no indication of a time limit, nor is there any reference to what she is dying from. All the reader knows is that the speaker is urgent in her message, and her message is based on love. But the last line of the octave, line 8, implies a higher love than the secular one shared by man and woman. Here, the speaker seems to tell her lover that once she is with God, he may as well not bother seeking help or praying because she will be far beyond his feeble and imperfect love. Only God's love is perfect.

In the latter part of the poem, the woman relinquishes her lover from his duty to remember her, acknowledging that, still on earth, he will encounter the "darkness and corruption" that befalls human beings on a regular basis. Feeling sorry for him, she frees him from any painful memories of her, particularly the recollections of how his love could never measure up to her expectations. In light of her strict faith, it would seem that no mortal man's ever could.

Balance and Contradiction

"Remember" is an exercise in opposites—a poem made up of a back-and-forth shift between balance and contradiction. This theme echoes Rossetti's own life, which often found her pulled between two poles, usually in regard to religion and worldly passion. This tension is reflected in the sonnet in both the speaker's indecision on whether to "turn to go" or "turning stay" and in her initial request to be remembered and her final request to be forgotten.

In her book, *Christina Rossetti Revisited*, critic Sharon Smulders says this of "Remember": "Poised between going and staying, between life and death, the speaker inhabits a subject position that is rife with indeterminacy." And in an article for *Victorian Poetry*, critic Thom Dombrowski notes that in Rossetti's religious poems in general "the torment is especially intense because the speaker . . . seems torn between longing and

loathing, hope and despair, resolution and weariness." The contradicting emotions and pull in opposite directions essentially pave the way for the balance that Rossetti provides at the end of the poem. Although the speaker appears unsure of whether to go or stay, in the end she has no choice. If her death is real, then she must leave her lover behind. But the conflict does not end there. Instead, the man's memory of her will carry on the duality she posed to him when she was alive. Will it be a good memory or a bad memory? The speaker's answer does not actually resolve the problem, but, rather provides an "out" for either result: if the memory is good, remember her; if it is bad, forget her.

Style

In Victorian England and centuries prior, writing poetry meant writing with formality, adhering to a specific line length, rhyme scheme, meter, and so forth. The sonnet is one of the most popular styles of formal verse, and there are two main types of sonnets□the Shakespearean (English) and the Petrarchan (Italian). In its structure, "Remember" most closely follows the Petrarchan style, named for the Italian poet Petrarch Francesco (1307-1374) who made it popular. This type of sonnet contains fourteen lines, divided into an octave (the first eight lines) and a sestet (the last six lines). Usually, the octave acts as a kind of rising action, presenting a question, vision, or desire that becomes the subject of the poem. The sestet is typically the resolution section, providing an answer to the question, bringing the vision into full view, or satisfying the desire expressed in the octave. A Petrarchan sonnet generally follows the rhyme scheme a-b-b-a-a-b-ba for the first eight lines and c-d-e-c-d-e for the final six.

Rosetti's "Remember" follows precisely the Petrarchan rhyme scheme for the octave, but offers a slight variation in the sestet, which rhymes c-dd- e-c-e. One cannot be certain why the poet strayed from the usual form, and perhaps it was simply because she liked the sound of it better this way. Some speculation has also suggested that rhyming lines 12 and 14 gives greater emphasis to the poem's ending, in which the speaker's final decision is revealed. As far as the use of the octave and sestet to present typical Petrarchan dilemma and resolution is concerned, this sonnet also runs off course, especially in the sestet. Rather than expanding on the idea of remembrance presented in the octave or bringing a satisfying closure to the speaker's assumed last request, the final lines in "Remember" speak of even grimmer "darkness and corruption" and jump from remembering to forgetting. As such, Rossetti's poem shows mastery of the formal style, but also demonstrates how slight deviations can provide greater impact for the work.

Historical Context

While the Rossetti family was gaining prominence in literary and artistic circles throughout England, Queen Victoria was in the early years of her long reign over the country, lasting from 1837 until her death in 1901. Because the Victorian era spanned much of the nineteenth century, it encompassed some of the greatest changes the world had witnessed up to that time. Foreign trade agreements, cultural expansion, the Industrial Revolution, widespread civil unrest, and a profusion of creative outlets all represented the social and political atmosphere of the times. This era also encompassed two prominent "ages" that occurred in the 1800s□the Age of Liberalism (1826-1850) and the Age of Imperialism (1875-1900). The former was characterized by social class battles and an effort by millions of citizens to secure a more democratic government, and the latter established empires for countries who were able to dominate small nations and gain control of world markets and raw materials. While emerging middle classes throughout the world struggled for greater recognition and independence, large governments exerted their imperialistic powers over weaker nations. Under Victoria, Great Britain expanded its colonial holdings in Africa and, in 1877, the queen was made Empress of India, thereby strengthening Britain's presence in Asia.

The term "Victorian" often carries a negative connotation because the queen to whom it refers was a rather dowdy, pretentious woman who gave new meaning to extremely high□and often hypocritical□ moral standards and proper conduct, especially for women. In spite of Victoria's title of Queen of Britain, she allowed her prime minister and other male members of Parliament to run the government. Victoria believed a woman's place was in the home, and during her reign, women took over the duties of running their households, spurred on by the establishment of many clothing and home furnishings retailers. But Queen Victoria was also widely respected for her strength of character and tact, and her reign was the longest in European history, except for King Louis XIV of France. Under her rule, Britain saw unprecedented industrial and commercial prosperity, and several reform acts enfranchised the new middle class and the working class, as well as millions of new voters. Legislators passed humanitarian laws that eliminated some of the worst abuses in workplaces, and, toward the end of the century, the labor party grew strong, a regular civil service was established, and more children had greater opportunities to receive an education.

The Rossetti children were not poor, but the family did suffer financial hardship after the death of the father in 1854. Everyone pitched in to find various sources of income, the most successful being William Michael, who was employed by the Excise Office and also made money as a literary journalist. It was his income that supported the Rossetti family throughout much of the mid-nineteenth century. Having established the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848, Dante Gabriel and other members of the movement were viewed by the well-schooled, formal artists and critics of the time as impertinent young men who wanted to make a name for themselves by rebelling against the cultural norm. The "norm" in question was that established more than three centuries earlier by Raphael who suggested proper guidelines for paintings, such as one-seventh of the

canvas should be in bright light and one-third in shadow, and the human figures used as subjects should represent ideal beauty. The Pre-Raphaelite movement began small but its influence was widespread in the art world, as well as the literary. The return to more natural subjects and less structured canvases paved the way for the loose, informal creativity that took hold in the mid-1800s and can still be seen today.

Critical Overview

Rossetti's poetry was widely accepted and appreciated from the beginning. Since her work, on the surface at least, was largely a reflection of Victorian primness and Anglican faith, it had no trouble making its way into the hearts and the libraries of the literary highbrows of the times. She was regarded as an important figure in the Pre-Raphaelite movement, and even those who criticized the rebellious nature of the brotherhood's painters turned a kinder eye toward the gentle, shy, and extremely pious poet.

In his article, "Christina Rossetti: A Reconsideration," critic Robert N. Keane notes that Rossetti "has been regarded by many as Britain's finest poet, yet her work has seldom been studied for its own sake." Instead, it was often thought of only in terms of its relationship to the Pre-Raphaelite movement, or in comparison to possibly the most popular female Victorian poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. But with Browning's death in 1861, Rossetti rose to the top of the list in many literary circles. Still, her work tended to be qualified by many readers and critics who studied it for its religious messages or its lessons in morality. Others searched it for hidden clues to the true nature of a fanatically devout and presumed lonely woman who devoted herself to church and family at the expense of personal happiness in an intimate relationship. When more recent researchers began looking at female Victorian poets for hints of early feminist views, Rossetti's work was heralded as a voice secretly crying out for independence and freedom while remaining obediently within the strictures of the Victorian woman's place. As Keane points out, however, "In the last few years . . . there has been some movement toward studying her poetry for its own sake."

Whether the reviews have been based on fair terms or not, the overall consensus of critics is that Rossetti was one of the nineteenth century's best poets. She has consistently been praised for her ability to master formal verse, and the simple, honest voices of the speakers in her poems give authority to the tone, the subject matter, and the sometimes odd perspectives of the speakers themselves.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Hill is the author of a poetry collection, has published widely in poetry journals, and is an associate editor for a university communications department. In the following essay, she discusses the lack of sincerity in the poem's speaker and why it results from an inner conflict between worldly desires and religious fervor.

When it comes to poetry, many readers assume that the "I" in a poem must be the voice of the poet him or herself. While it is often true that at least a glimmer of the author's own beliefs, experiences, and perspectives show up in any creative work, one should not take for granted that a first-person narrative is always an autobiographical account. All that being the case, however, Christina Rossetti and her sonnets are hard to separate. That is, because her pious, reserved lifestyle is so heavily reflected in her work, a reader can safely make the assumption that was just warned against. Rossetti usually *is* the "I" in her sonnets, and "Remember" is a good example. Just like the poet, the speaker in this poem wages a war of conscience, one side leaning toward human love, the other toward divine love. And in this case, it is a struggle that renders her feelings on the human side hypocritical and false.

The title of the sonnet seems appropriate, at least through the octave. Beyond that, there is room for debate, but even in the first eight lines there are hints foreshadowing the abrupt change of heart that occurs in the sestet. It appears the speaker cannot make up her mind about whether she should stay with her lover or "turn to go." This would be an odd hesitation if she were describing only her impending death, but the dilly-dallying has more to do with living than with dying. A part of her wants to remain with the man she addresses and to enjoy a loving relationship as a typical couple. Another part denies worldly pleasure by placing God at the center of her attention, and, therefore, death, since that is the vehicle to heaven in the Christian faith. Rossetti forfeited two romantic relationships in her lifetime because the suitors fell short of the religious fervor she expected in them. The speaker in "Remember" opts to give up hers as well, supposedly because she is dying, but that notion turns out to be a facade for something all too commonly human.

The last three lines of the octave are nonchalant at best, callous at worst. If the reader accepts that the male companion here is truly in love with a dying woman□and there is no evidence suggesting otherwise□then imagine his emotion upon hearing her say what amounts to, "Yes, I know you were planning on a future together, but all you will have is your memory because I'm going to meet God. You're too late." This sentiment, of course, implies that there have been false feelings on the woman's part long before the impasse she and the man now face. Apparently, the speaker has always had hidden doubts about her love for him. She has never denied her love for God though, and given that she cannot resolve loving a human being and a supreme power at the same time, it must be the commitment to her suitor that does not quite ring true.

The speaker finally comes clean in the sonnet's sestet. Here, she reveals an opposing, and apparently more accurate, sentiment toward her lover's memory of her. She now

gives him permission to forget. At first, this may seem to be a noble, selfless gesture, one reflecting such strong love for the man that she is making decisions to benefit his best interest even after she is gone. And perhaps her motive *is* charitable and devoted, but she also points out that her lover's pending grief will stem from a "vestige of the thoughts that once" she had thoughts about leaving him because she did not love him or because her attraction to him interfered with her religious faith. He may likely look back on their relationship and recall that it was not as secure and loving as he had imagined and hoped for. In that case, he should put the painful memories out of his mind and go on with his life, presumably with another woman who really loves him. If he accepts this instruction as selfless on the woman's part, then all is well and the poem ends resolutely, if not happily. But can the man overlook the fact that the speaker states her case in such a nonchalant, carefree manner?

An abrupt change of heart or mind often implies falseness in whatever notion is suddenly altered. Three times in the first eight lines of Rossetti's sonnet she uses the phrase "remember me." Include the title and the context is fairly solid: this poem reflects a longing to be remembered by a loved one. The sestet, of course, indicates this is not so. The constant pull between opposites has resulted in the speaker's inability to be completely sincere in either direction. Whatever initial appeal she may find in a man is quickly thwarted by her tendency to see him as less than perfect, less than godly. On the other hand, as devoted as she is to her church and her God, she nonetheless admits a longing for human intimacy. While obviously the vast majority of individuals who are just as devout in their religious faith have no problem carrying on long-lasting, loving marriages at the same time, the speaker in "Remember" cannot. Rossetti died a single woman, perhaps making this poem an eerie foreshadowing of her own circumstance at the end of her life.

Some readers will find this criticism harsh or overstated, and one could make a good argument in either case. The problem often faced with sonnets in which there is an "I" addressing a "you" is that subtlety far outweighs concrete description. This leaves the poet's history, a good knowledge of the poet's other work, and much implication as the starting point for comments and critique. Whether one views "Remember" as a flippant poem about a woman who has been a wishy-washy lover with a neurotic hang-up on religion or as an honest outpouring of true love and devotion from the lips of a dying woman, one point is clear: the circumstance is unfortunate for both the speaker and the man she addresses. Even if she has been insincere in the relationship, she at least attempted; the hypocrisy and falseness are not necessarily intended. She is caught between two opposing forces and appears helpless in standing firm for one or in finding a way to resolve a conflict that does not need to exist in the first place. Therefore, blame is not the issue here. While there may be room for a bit of guilt on the part of the speaker, she is a victim as much as is her companion.

Source: Pamela Steed Hill, Critical Essay on "Remember," in *Poetry for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay excerpt, Conley compares and contrasts "Remember" with "After Death," a poem Rossetti wrote around the same time.

In the sonnet "Remember" (1849) the speaker addresses a lover concerning her imminent death, with the repeated imperative to "remember me." Unlike "Song" ("When I am dead, my dearest") (1848), in which the speaker withdraws from the beloved into the indifference of death, "Remember" presents a speaker who at least appears to engage with the beloved and offer remembrance as the possibility of continuity between life and death. However, while adopting a different strategy to that of "Song," in which death renders null and void the terms "remember" and "forget" through an equivocating diction of indifference□"Haply I may remember, / And haply may forget"□"Remember" privileges first one term and then the other, until their independent value is eroded.

Death is never named in "Remember," but is invoked in the opening lines through the common conceit of the distant, "silent land", and elaborated in lines 3-6 in a description of a future of loss, of a negation of the lovers' present happiness. Yet what is the nature of their present relationship□ why does the speaker vacillate between going and staying; why is it "*our* future that *you* planned" (my emphasis)? The subtle suggestion through these details of a problematic love relationship retrospectively undermines even the apparently easy intimacy of line 3□"when you can no more hold me by the hand"□until it hints at coercion: unlike the lover, death at least lets her "turn [and] go." As in "Song," the desire for death rather than the beloved speaks loudest in the poem; death as an escape from a life that is enigmatically unsatisfactory, from an intimate relationship that mysteriously falls short.

Why, then, the repeated exhortations to "remember me"? The phrase occurs three times in the octave, becoming urgent in the final repetition, "Only remember me." The addition of the adverb here is further highlighted by its inverted stress, and the phrase as a whole is isolated by the caesura which follows, the only mid-line break in the whole poem. Yet the ambiguous syntax□"remember me alone" or "simply remember me"□undermines the very urgency of her plea; and the value of remembrance itself is in turn made dubious by what follows□" you understand / It will be late to counsel then or pray"□which implies that remembrance is what is left when it is too late to do something more effective. So even before we reach the sestet and the sonnet's turn, the rubric "remember me" appears to be virtually emptied of its literal meaning. While in one way a talisman *against* death, the realm of forgetting, its repetition creates a somnolent refrain where sound overwhelms sense, until it proleptically signifies the dissolution of meaning and the speaker's own forgetting in death. Its loss of proper meaning conjures its opposite: the void of forgetting.

Nevertheless, after the entreaties to "remember me," the turn at line 9 is still unsettling, especially due to the ease with which the speaker permits the lover to forget her. Lines 9-10 illustrate the paradoxical nature of the relationship between remembering and forgetting, acknowledging as they do that the lover will grieve only when he remembers

he has forgotten; that remembering depends for its meaning on, and is only kept alive by, the possibility of forgetting: "Yet if you should forget me for a while, / And afterwards remember, do not grieve." As the dialectic of remembering and forgetting becomes more intricate, Rossetti takes bold license with the rhyme scheme in the sestet, with a nonsymmetrical pattern, *cddece.* One way in which the subtle and subversive effects of this poem are achieved can be observed by noting that the lines in which the word "forget" appears (once in the first line of the sestet and once in the penultimate line) also contain the most widely spaced of the poem's five end rhymes, forming thus the subtlest of alliances: "while" and "smile" link the passing of time with the passing of grief, suggesting the inevitable passage from remembrance to forgetting.

Such an inevitable progression, or perhaps regression, is suggested more directly in lines 11-12: "For if the darkness and corruption leave / A vestige of the thoughts that once I had." These lines seem to reveal the poem's real interest, which revolves less around whether the lover remembers or forgets, than around the "darkness and corruption" of the grave and the fate of human "thoughts" therein. By projecting the speaker into the grave, rather than into an identifiably Christian afterlife, these lines could be read, like many of Rossetti's poems on the death-state, as a virtual denial of such an afterlife in their exclusive focus on the grave, the place of the body. The vision of death is especially bleak in these lines, with their metonymic extension of the literal destruction of the dead body to the figurative destruction of her "thoughts" of the lover, and, vice versa, their extension of a figurative, that is, metaphysical "darkness and corruption" to the "thoughts that once I had." Further, the use of the neutral "thoughts," rather than the expected "love," creates an emotional detachment consonant with the speaker's ambivalence toward the lover detected in the octave. As in "Song," the speaker seems to become absorbed into the indifferent world of the dead during the course of the poem. Thus, by the closing lines□"Better by far you should forget and smile / Than that you should remember and be sad"□the poem has achieved a complete *volte-face,* from imploring remembrance, to preferring that the lover forget her. Rossetti has employed the form of the Petrachan sonnet with a sinister logic. The binary thematics of the poem, based on both stated and implicit pairs of terms□ living/dead, stay/go, past/future, smile/sad, remember/ forget□are completely realigned by the end: life is linked with remembrance and sorrow, while death is linked with the smile of forgetfulness.

As I have suggested, these lyrics are the basis on which Rossetti's work has been characterized solely and often dismissively in terms of a lyric spontaneity and simplicity. Even in a recent critical anthology on Rossetti, a prolific critic of Victorian poetry writes that by the end of "Remember," "tactful concern for the lover . . . displaces any selfcentred desire to live on in his memory." Such a reading is clearly overdetermined by the prevalent biographical myth of Rossetti as a meek, deferential Victorian spinster, "tactfully" self-renouncing. By contrast, I am arguing for a reading that hears a skeptical, ironic female voice.

"Remember" and "After Death" (1849) were copied into Rossetti's notebook within three months of each other; and in *Goblin Market and Other Poems* she placed "After Death" immediately following "Remember." This latter fact at least invites comparison between

the two; at most, it suggests that "After Death," in which we hear the voice of a woman now dead, may be read as the sequel to "Remember." "After Death," however, establishes an altogether different mood from that of "Remember." This is partly due to its different use of the sonnet form. Unlike the unbroken lines and verbal echoes of "Remember," contributing to its dreamy melodiousness□"gone away / Gone far away"; "turn . . . turning"; "day by day"□ "After Death" breaks up the line more often than not with increased punctuation and enjambment. In addition, the octave, consisting of the speaker's description of the scene in the room where she has just died, has less of a lyric and more of a narrative structure than "Remember":

The curtains were half drawn, the floor was swept
And strewn with rushes, rosemary and may
Lay thick upon the bed on which I lay,
Where thro' the lattice ivy-shadows crept.
He leaned above me, thinking that I slept
And could not hear him; but I heard him say:
"Poor child, poor child:" and as he turned away
Came a deep silence, and I knew he wept.

The first quatrain suggests an archaic, perhaps medieval setting□the rushes, herbs, and flowers, and the ivy-covered lattice window□and this, as part of a deathbed scene, immediately conjures the world of Pre-Raphaelite gothic. Enhancing this is the effect of the uncanny, produced by the contrast between the speaker's straightforward, nonemotive reportage, and the awareness that she is dead. The next quatrain introduces the would-be mourner of her death, an unnamed "he." The speaker appears at pains to display her superior vantage point over this man; for while "He leaned above me" connotes a figuratively superior position, this is quickly shown to be falsely assumed, both by him and us: "but I heard him say." The speaker's ascendancy over him is heightened here by the simple, monosyllabic diction and balanced syntax of line 6, as she coolly negates his presumption of her deathly insentience. The inclusion of direct speech ("'Poor child, poor child'") is unusual among these death lyrics, in giving the lover a voice, however small, in the poem. Yet it is not a voice in dialogue with the speaker, but a solitary voice on which she eavesdrops; further, his words sound merely patronizing, his pity ironically undercut, placed as it is within her knowing narrative, in which she demonstrates the supreme vantage point of death.

The sestet abandons the narrative mode in which the speaker has quietly established her authority over the living, and offers instead a catalogue of omitted actions through which "he" is judged and found wanting. Here is an ironic variation on the litany of worldly rejection usually uttered by Rossetti's dying speakers ("Sing no sad songs," "Wreathe no more lilies in my hair" ["'The Summer is ended'"]). Speaking "after death," rather than before, the woman rebukes "his" stance of denial or rejection toward her. The object of the actions listed in lines 9-11 is the dead body, so these are symbolic ministrations, signifying an intense emotional attachment to the physical person of the beloved□the passionate bereavement she would have him feel, if he was the lover she wishes he were. The parallel syntax of lines 9 and 12□ "He did not touch," "He did not

love"□reinforces the equation offered between these sins of omission and the absence of love.

The final lines of "After Death" have been conventionally read as granting "his" redemption through his pity, the poem ending on a note of selfeffacing generosity (not unlike the "tactful" renunciation of "Remember") or, alternatively, of "immature self-pity." Yet to what extent pity redeems him, if at all, depends on the worth assigned it by the poem. Pity is distinguished from love, clearly to its detriment:

He did not love me living; but once dead
He pitied me.

Firstly, "He pitied me" is isolated by enjambment, to parallel "He did not love me living"; secondly, there is an alignment through alliteration between "love" and "living," and through consonance between "dead" and "pitied." The apparent self-effacement of the closing words□

. . . and very sweet it is
To know he still is warm tho' I am cold.

□is in one sense real. For when for the first time in the poem the speaker expresses emotion, she effaces herself, as subject, from the utterance. This is in marked contrast to the sprinkling of simple verb phrases in which she has so far presented herself□"I lay," "I slept," "I heard," "I knew"□ that collectively emphasize her heightened awareness "after death," even as such emotionally neutral verbs sustain an impression of aloofness and selfcontrol. This leads me to suggest that the speaker attaches herself only obliquely to "very sweet" because of the emotional freight of this moment, and instead lends weight to her final words, "I am cold." Abandoning the prose syntax of the rest of the poem, these closing words promote ambiguity, as they simultaneously uncover and obscure the intense feeling they bear. "Sweet" is the only significant term in the last three lines without a companion word: there is "love" and "pitied," "living" and "dead," "warm" and "cold." In such a context, "sweet" invokes "bitter," and indeed *bittersweet* seems to capture precisely the conclusion to this poem.

The words "warm" and "cold" in the final line clearly operate metonymically for "the living" and "the dead." Yet, in addition, their several literal and figurative meanings flicker retrospectively over the poem. The word "cold" is given structural prominence both by being the final word of the poem, and by forming part of a rhyme ("cold"/"fold") that is so widely spaced it is barely heard. This neardissonance contributes to the unsettling effect of the final line. "Cold" has resonances throughout the poem, from the creeping "ivy shadows," to the dead body whose hand is not held, to "his" tears of chilly pity. "Cold" also is the speaker's voice, a voice that reveals little emotion as she turns a cold, judging eye on the scene of her death and on "him." Such all-pervasive coldness enhances the irony of the final line, in which the epithet "warm" resonates with all that the poem shows to be lacking□life, love, and passionate emotion. And while replete with irony, the final line is, at the same time, sincerely spoken; for, as with almost all of

Rossetti's dead or dying, death *is* to be preferred over life, and for this speaker in particular, death is a bittersweet victory over the unloving living.

Source: Susan Conley, "Rossetti's Cold Women: Irony and Liminal Fantasy in the Death Lyrics," in *The Culture of Christina Rossetti*, edited by Mary Arseneau, Antony H. Harrison, and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, Ohio University Press, 1999, pp. 260-84.

Adaptations

Visit the "ArtMagick" web site at http://www. artmagick.com/index.asp (last accessed August, 2001), a "virtual museum displaying paintings and poetry from art movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (for example: romantic, symbolist, Pre-Raphaelite and art nouveau). The site includes dozens of paintings by the Pre-Raphaelites, as well as twenty poems by Christina Rossetti.

Topics for Further Study

Try writing a Petrarchan sonnet. Remember that there is a general expectation of what the content in the octave and in the sestet should provide, as well as strict meter and rhyme schemes throughout.

Read as much information as you can on Queen Victoria of Great Britain and then write an essay on some of the likely reasons that she was the longest reigning monarch in European history (besides Louis XIV).

The Pre-Raphaelite art movement was a shortlived one, but it paved the way for other "rebellious" styles of painting, sculpting, writing, and so forth. What twentieth-century art movements have also been controversial and considered out of the mainstream? How have they been received by the general public and other artists?

The Industrial Revolution brought swift changes to manufacturing, production, and communication capabilities throughout the world. What do you think was the most significant invention of the age and why?

Compare and Contrast

1850s: American social reformer and feminist Amelia Jenks Bloomer initiates "bloomer" fashion when she starts wearing full-cut pants under skirts. Bloomers enable women to move more freely and comfortably than did petticoats.

Today: Just about anything goes in the world of fashion for women□from conservative business suits and low heels to revived mini-skirts and tall black boots to the ever-present blue jeans, sweat shirts, and sneakers. "Bloomers" are an option, not a must, for some.

1850s: Florence Nightingale takes London nurses to the battlefields of the Crimean War, a conflict pitting Britain, France, and Turkey against Russia when the latter tries to advance into Turkey. Nightingale organizes a barracks hospital in a war that will claim more lives through disease than combat.

Today: Women still make up the great majority of the nursing field, but they are also increasing their numbers as physicians. Approximately twenty-five percent of doctors today are women, and forty-three percent of all medical students are female.

1850s: The first Women's Rights Convention in the United States, led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, opens at Seneca Falls, New York in 1948. In 1953, seventy-three women present a petition to the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention urging women's right to vote.

Today: The League of Women Voters, begun in 1920 as an advocate for citizen education, has seen its numbers steadily decrease over the years, mostly because women are more concerned about juggling careers and family responsibilities and young adults are not particularly interested in civic participation. Ironically, though, the number of women voters has been higher than their male counterparts for the past two decades.

What Do I Read Next?

In 1994, editor and poet Linda Hall put together a remarkable collection of women's poetry, including works from both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Called *An Anthology of Poetry by Women: Tracing the Tradition*, this book contains poems by such notable Victorian poets as Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, as well as contemporary American poets, including Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton.

The Language of Exclusion, written by Sharon Leader and published in 1987, is a feminist critical study of the nineteenth century's two most puzzling and shy female poets□Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson. Leader argues that most studies of women poets written before 1960 simply perpetuate the spinster/ recluse view of these two women instead of highlighting their public significance and the impact that history and environment had on their demeanor.

British scholar Christopher Hibbert's *Queen Victoria: A Personal History* (2000) is one of the most refreshing biographies of the prim, somewhat pompous, ruler of England because he explores a side of her that is rarely shown. This book describes the queen's relationship with her husband, children, and members of government and portrays her as a fun-loving, passionate woman who was madly in love with her partner and was sometimes a difficult, overbearing mother.

The 2000 publication of Elizabeth Prettejohn's *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* provides readers a look at a much-studied subject. This book is considered the most comprehensive view of the movement to date, and it shows why Pre- Raphaelite art is still one of the most fascinating, sometimes shocking styles that never seems to lose popularity with museum-goers worldwide.

Further Study

Jones, Kathleen, *Learning Not to Be First: The Life of Christina Rossetti*, St. Martin's Press, 1992.

This biography of Rossetti is comprehensive and easy to read. It takes a sensitive look at the poet, based on the humble, pious, and selfless life she lived.

Lootens, Tricia A., *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender, and Victorian Literary Canonization*, University Press of Virginia, 1996.

Lootens presents an interesting look at how and why many Victorian female writers were thought of as "saints," often at the expense of seeing them for who they really were. With such chapter titles as "Poet Worship Meets 'Woman' Worship" and "Canonization of Christina Rossetti," this book is a good read for those who want a better grasp of the environment in which Victorian women wrote and lived.

Rossetti, Christina, *The Letters of Christina Rossetti*, edited by Antony H. Harrison, University Press of Virginia, 1997.

Reading the correspondence that Rossetti sent to her family and friends is beneficial in understanding the poet's mindset. The letters confirm her devout Christian faith and help the reader understand why she would have written poems with themes of imperfect love, religion, and death.

, *A Pageant and Other Poems*, Roberts Brothers, 1881.

Original copies of this book are likely to be housed in "rare books" sections of libraries and must be read there. However, later editions are available, and it is worth the read, especially for the "Monna Innominata" (Unnamed Lady) sonnet sequence.

 Selected Prose of Christina Rossetti, edited by David A. Kent and P. G. Stanwood, St. Martin's Press, 1998.

Any reader who is seriously interested in understanding Rossetti's poetry and the perspective from which she wrote should read her prose as well. This book provides generous excerpts of both her short

stories and religious writings, along with helpful introductions,
publication histories, and synopses of the
entire works. In general, Rossetti's prose is more revealing
of her powerful intellect and keen perception
of theological issues than her poetry is.

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Rosenblum, Dolores, *Christina Rossetti: The Poetry of Endurance*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1986, p. 209.

Rossetti, Christina, *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti*, Vol. 1, edited by R. W. Crump, Louisiana State University Press, 1979, p. 37.

Smulders, Sharon, *Christina Rossetti Revisited*, Twayne Publishers, 1996, p. 125.

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Poetry for Students (PfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, PfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of PfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of PfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in PfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by PfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

PfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Poetry for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Poetry for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Poetry for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from PfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from PfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Poetry for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Poetry for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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