

BA I – English Opt – Paper II – Poetry
‘Remember’ by Christina Rossetti

Introduction

Although it has been taken as a tried and tested pattern that the Pre-Raphaelite poets were all melancholy, death-obsessed, and miserable every waking moment, Christina Rossetti, on the other hand, was different. Born in London in 1830, Christina Rossetti belonged to a wealthy family and was brought up as a pious Anglican. She kept most of her poems around numerous themes starting from love to the seasons of the year. In addition, she is also well-known to make use of little visual detail in her poetry. She in fact freed her ideas to speak up for themselves.

She was the youngest child of a very gifted, loving family, and her early childhood was very happy and devoid of hardship. She had three brothers and sisters, and received a very good education – practically unheard of at the time for women. Her brother, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, became an accomplished painter and poet, her sister Maria was a renowned Dante scholar, and her brother William followed her in the fields of art and literary criticism.

‘Remember’, written by a Pre-Raphaelite poet, Christina Rossetti (1830-1894), when she was still a teenager, is a classic Victorian poem about mourning and remembrance. It was written in 1849 but not published until 1862 when it appeared in Rossetti’s first volume, *Goblin Market and Other Poems*. Here is the poem, along with a few words by way of analysis.

Remember

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 plann’d:
 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.

Summary of the Poem

The poet has written the sonnet, *Remember*, to a lover. It talks about their love, her death, and how she wishes him to react when she has left this world or “Gone far away into the silent land.”

In summary, the poet requests that the addressee of the poem remember her after she has died. (The addressee is presumably her lover, since they had ‘plann’d’ a ‘future’ together.) But what gives the poem a twist is the concluding thought that it would be better for her loved one to forget her and be happy than to remember her if it makes that person sad. It is this second part of the poem’s ‘argument’ that saves it from spilling over into mawkish sentimentality. In this respect, ‘Remember’ is **similar to Rossetti’s earlier poem ‘Song’ (‘When I am dead, my dearest’)**, also written when she was in her teens: in that poem, too, Rossetti entreats someone *not* to sing any sad songs for her when she dies, and says it does not matter whether her lover remembers or forgets her.

‘Remember’ is composed in **the form known as the Petrarchan sonnet**, rhymed *abba abba cdd ece*, traditionally associated with love poetry (indeed, Petrarch, who pioneered the form, wrote love sonnets to the woman he admired, Laura). As with all Petrarchan sonnets there is a *volta* (or ‘turn’) at the end of the eighth line and the beginning of the ninth, marking the point where the *octave* (eight-line section) ends and the *sestet* (six-line section) begins. This ‘turn’ is signalled by Rossetti’s use of the word ‘Yet’: the argument of the sonnet changes direction at this point.

The context of the poem is the Victorian era, known for its cult of mourning: people would go into mourning for Dickens’s characters when they died (e.g. Little Nell), while Victoria herself would effectively spend the last forty years of her life in mourning for her husband, Prince Albert (who, incidentally, had died the year before Rossetti’s poem was published). Albert’s death created an appetite for poems about mourning, as had Tennyson’s popular long elegy, *In Memoriam*, which had been published in 1850). What marks Rossetti’s treatment of this theme is the plainness and directness of her speech: she speaks to her lover with an intimate simplicity and tenderness. And, as noted at the start of this analysis, her refusal to give way to a sentimental desire to be eternally and continuously remembered by those she leaves behind.

Q. Critical Analysis of the poem – Remember

The sonnet *Remember* by Christina Rossetti was written in 1849 when Rossetti was just 19 years old. She is touted to be one of the foremost women poets of the 19th century Victorian era. In this famous sonnet, *Remember*, the poet introduces the themes of love, death, and reaction to death.

The very pattern of the poem makes it easy to remember. Rossetti chose to repeat the word 'remember' throughout the poem, thus allowing the reader's mind to grow used to this pattern of repetition; as one 'remember' fades, the other comes into play, segueing from image to image and allowing the reader to understand the full experience of what Rossetti is asking. It can therefore be easily split into four stanzas, each categorized by a single verse wherein the word 'remember' appears. However, it is not just the theme of memory that is in play here; by 'remembering', the narrator hopes to overcome death. As has been mentioned in many poems of the Romantic era, the true glory of poetry was that one was made immortal through the lines written.

The Speaker of the poem is scared, not of death, but of her lover forgetting her. It is to her the most brutal thing that could happen to her – her tone wavers between conciliatory and contemplative, soft and weak, as she tries to implore her beloved to never forget her even when she has 'gone far away into the silent land'. In the first few lines, she is adamant that she must be remembered at all costs, when she is no longer physically present to remind her lover to do so.

Theme / Central Idea of the Poem - Remember

The poet has written the sonnet, *Remember*, to a lover. It talks about their love, her death, and how she wishes him to react when she has left this world or "Gone far away into the silent land."

From the lines 1-3, the poet deals with the element of death, and tries to make her lover understand that he needs not remember her even after her death. She says that when she has died, she will go into the silent land from where it will be impossible for him to hold her by the hand. Nor can she come back from the half way.

The poet further says that it is of no use to counsel or pray later, i.e. when she is gone. She says what if you will forget her for a while, and then pretend to remember her by grieving over her death.

From lines 9 to 14, the poet gives instructions to her lover by saying that he must go on with his life and should not keep thinking about her death as she would rather he "...forget and smile...than remember and be sad". The poet here makes use of a euphemism in the very first line of this sonnet when she says, "Remember me when I am gone away."

The euphemism here refers to the poet's death. It may also be viewed as a metaphor when compare death with the notion of undertaking a journey. This is the journey which starts from one world to next, which, of course relates to the main theme of the poem.

She, in line 2 of this sonnet, makes use of another metaphor when she says, "Gone far away into the silent land". It is to be noted here that the notion of eternal life is depicted as a 'silent land' which hints at the lost connection between the dead and living, kept only in the memory that's fluid, transient, and insubstantial.

The third euphemism can be seen in the eleventh line of this sonnet, when the poet says: "For if the darkness and corruption leave". In this line, death is viewed as corruption and darkness. It is like body decaying. The poet here is very excited and says that he should not take her death and his subsequent memory as a burden to him. Therefore, she suggests that he should better 'forget and smile.'

The sonnet *Remember* by Christina Rossetti was written in 1849 when Rossetti was just 19 years old. She is touted to be one of the foremost women poets of the 19th century Victorian era. In this famous sonnet, *Remember*, the poet introduces the themes of love, death, and reaction to death.

The poet has written the sonnet, *Remember*, to a lover. It talks about their love, her death, and how she wishes him to react when she has left this world or "Gone far away into the silent land."

From the lines 1-3, the poet deals with the element of death, and tries to make her lover understand that he needs not remember her even after her death. She says that when she has died, she will go into the silent land from where it will be impossible for him to hold her by the hand. Nor can she come back from the half way.

Remember me when no more day by day

You tell me of our future that you plann'd:

The above two lines (5 and 6) suggest that Rossetti and her lover should have got married so that they could show their love for each other. In the above lines the poet expects a lot from her lover, and even suggest him that he must not grieve over her death he cannot remember her.

It will be late to counsel then or pray.

Yet if you should forget me for a while

And afterwards remember, do not grieve:

The poet further says that it is of no use to counsel or pray later, i.e. when she is gone. She says what if you will forget her for a while, and then pretend to remember her by grieving over her death.

From lines 9 to 14, the poet gives instructions to her lover by saying that he must go on with his life and should not keep thinking about her death as she would rather he "...forget and smile...than remember and be sad". The poet here makes use of a euphemism in the very first line of this sonnet when she says, "Remember me when I am gone away."

The euphemism here refers to the poet's death. It may also be viewed as a metaphor when compare death with the notion of undertaking a journey. This is the journey which starts from one world to next, which, of course relates to the main theme of the poem.

She, in line 2 of this sonnet, makes use of another metaphor when she says, "Gone far away into the silent land". It is to be noted here that the notion of eternal life is depicted as a 'silent land' which hints at the lost connection between the dead and living, kept only in the memory that's fluid, transient, and insubstantial.

For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of thoughts that I once had,
Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad.

The third euphemism can be seen in the eleventh line of this sonnet, when the poet says: "For if the darkness and corruption leave". In this line, death is viewed as corruption and darkness. It is like body decaying. The poet here is very excited and says that he should not take her death and his subsequent memory as a burden to him. Therefore, she suggests that he should better 'forget and smile.'

While Rossetti doesn't make much use of several symbols in her poetic works, in this sonnet she makes use of the word "silent land" for eternal life. Here she might be indicting towards her Calvinist belief in pre-destination.

She might have also used the term "silent land" in place of heaven or hell as she is not aware of which eternal life she is destined to live in. This is just her assumption. The language of this sonnet is so simple and meaningful that the reader can also easily apply it to his/her lives. The message that this sonnet wants to give is that death is inescapable, but it must not gobble up the lives of those who are still alive.

This is an amazing poem with simple language and great theme. Both these features of it work in tandem with the rhyme scheme, such as *abba abba cdd ece*, thus making it sound pleasantly. The beauty of this sonnet lies not only its choice of languages, but also in retaining or maintaining a somewhat complex idea.

Rossetti had written this sonnet to her lover with the instruction and advice that he needs not be upset after her death. She advises him not to remember anything about her for she would rather know that he is happier than that he is, in a sense, dead while alive.

The message given by this poem must be applied by all of us to our lives, as well for it's really the ultimate solution to handle the death of our near and dear ones.

Courtesy:

<https://interestingliterature.com/2016/01/25/a-short-analysis-of-christina-rossettis-remember/>

<https://poemanalysis.com/remember-by-christina-rossetti-poem-analysis/2/>