Echo

POEM TEXT

Come to me in the silence of the night;
Come in the speaking silence of a dream;
Come with soft rounded cheeks and eyes as bright
As sunlight on a stream;
Come back in tears,
O memory, hope, love of finished years.

Oh dream how sweet, too sweet, too bitter sweet,
Whose wakening should have been in Paradise,
Where souls brimful of love abide and meet;
Where thirsting longing eyes
Watch the slow door
That opening, letting in, lets out no more.

Yet come to me in dreams, that I may live
My very life again though cold in death:
Come back to me in dreams, that I may give
Pulse for pulse, breath for breath:
Speak low, lean low,
As long ago, my love, how long ago.

SUMMARY

Visit me at night, when it's quiet. Communicate with me using the soundless images of dreams. Let me see your tender, full cheeks and eyes that light up like water in sunlight. Let me feel you again in the form of tears, you who I remember from, and loved and hoped with during, years gone by.

A wonderful dream! Almost too wonderful. Both wonderful and terrible, because it should have ended with me waking up in heaven, where souls overflowing with love linger and come together, where yearning eyes are glued to the door that, once it lets someone in, doesn't let them out again.

Still, I want you to visit me in my dreams so that I can experience all those happy memories again, even though my heart is now frozen over with grief. Visit me in dreams so that I can match your heartbeat with mine, your breath with mine. Talk to me quietly, come closer, just as you once did, my dear, such a long time ago.

THEMES

LOVE, LOSS, AND MEMORY

"Echo" illustrates how memories of past love reverberate into the present. The speaker, mourning the loss of a beloved, wishes they could be permanently reunited with this person in the afterlife; until then, they have to make do with dreams and memories of the time they spent together. These metaphorical "echoes" aren't as vivid as the real thing, which happened "long ago," yet the speaker clings to them anyway. Loss, it seems, has made the speaker's memories feel like the only place worth living. And yet, in living in the past, the pome implies that the speaker sacrifices their joy and vitality in the *present*.

The speaker feels as if the best days of their life are over; all they want is to be reunited with a deceased lover who once made them happy. They dream of their beloved waiting for them in "Paradise," watching "the slow door" where people enter and never leave again. They imply that they long to be on the other side of that door, "Where souls brimful of love abide and meet." That is, they're ready to leave behind their mortal form so their spirit can join their lover's.

The speaker's desire to take refuge in "Echo[es]" of the past—dreams and memories of old love—suggests that their loss makes the present hard to bear. Indeed, the speaker describes *themselves* as "cold in death," even though it's their *beloved* who has died. Without the happiness their beloved brought them, life feels devoid of warmth, beauty, and meaning. The speaker lives only for those brief moments in sleep when they can dream of their lover's "soft rounded cheeks and eyes."

For this speaker, it's easier to cling to memories than move on. But this nostalgia leaves them feeling like an "Echo"—a faint remnant of who they once were. Only when the deceased returns in dreams can the speaker "give / Pulse for pulse, breath for breath." In other words, the speaker isn't really living their life anymore. When awake, they feel their vitality has diminished. Like an echo that only repeats a sound from the past, they simply replay the same memories over and over, growing weaker and fainter with time.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-18

DREAMS AS A RESPITE FROM GRIEF

"Echo" portrays certain dreams as a temporary

respite from grief. The speaker pleads with their deceased lover to visit them in dreams at night. These dreams are "bitter sweet," however: they reunite the speaker with their lover, yet they're ultimately an illusion—and each time the speaker wakes, they experience the pain of parting all over again. Still, the poem implied, these dreams are better than nothing, since they let the speaker temporarily forget their loss and relive the happiest moments of their life. They momentarily soothe the ongoing pain of bereavement.

While the relief dreams provide can't last, the speaker's intense longing for them shows the value of even these fleeting moments of respite. The speaker describes their dreams of the beloved as "sweet," then "too sweet," then "too bitter sweet," suggesting that the joy of the dreams inevitably gives way to reality. Still, these moments are what the speaker looks forward to throughout the day; even a temporary reprieve from pain is better than none.

In dreams, the speaker can feel the "memory, hope, [and] love" of years gone by, which "Come back" in the form of "tears." These tears (shed by the speaker and/or beloved) signify both joy and sorrow: joy because the couple is temporarily reunited, sorrow because the dream must end. When their loved one arrives in dreams, the speaker is able to "live / [their] very life again." For as long as the dream lasts, the worst hasn't yet come to pass, and the speaker gets to feel the way they felt when they were young and in love. Of course, each dream ends with the speaker once again losing their love—waking to the knowledge that their love is in "Paradise," while they're still here on earth.

So the cycle continues, with one night "Echo[ing]" the next. The speaker looks eagerly forward to sleep, when they can connect with their missing loved one. They beg the beloved to appear "in the silence of the night" and "in the speaking silence of a dream." Only once the world is quiet and the demands of the day have been set aside can the speaker find solace for their grief. That the silence "speak[s]" suggests that their dreams are a kind of communion with the dead, a chance to exchange words they can never again speak in waking life.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-2
- Line 7
- Lines 13-14
- Lines 15-16

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2

Come to me in the silence of the night;
Come in the speaking silence of a dream;

In "Echo," the speaker addresses their deceased lover. Apostrophe (the device in which a speaker addresses someone who can't respond) creates an intimate tone, as though the reader were eavesdropping on a private conversation. This "conversation" is one-sided, though: the speaker begs their beloved to visit them in dreams, but of course receives no response.

The title, "Echo," might also subtly allude to the ancient Greek myth of Echo and Narcissus. Echo fell in love with Narcissus but couldn't speak to him, due to a curse that made her capable only of repeating others' words. This allusion helps reinforce the idea that the speaker's lover can't hear them. The title also suggests that whatever experiences this couple shares in "dream[s]" are mere echoes of a former love; they aren't real in themselves.

Given the title, it's no surprise that "Echo" is full of repetition from the first lines onward:

> Come to me in the silence of the night;
> Come in the speaking silence of a dream;

These lines contain both anaphora ("Come [...] Come") and grammatical parallelism. They also repeat the word "silence." The repetitions create an insistent tone, conveying the speaker's desperate desire to see their beloved again. The emphasis on "silence" also helps establish a hushed, eerie atmosphere. Yet the oxymoron "speaking silence" implies that the "dream[s]," while soundless, communicate intense emotion. They're the speaker's only opportunity to see their lover again, so they're a welcome respite from the day-to-day reality of grief.

Repetition adds to the musicality of these opening lines, as does alliteration ("silence," "speaking silence"). These sibilant /s/ sounds give the language a whispering, intimate quality. One can imagine the speaker waiting till the dead of night to say these words aloud. Muted /m/ and /n/ consonance ("Come," "silence," "night," "dream") also contributes to the hushed tone.

The poem creates music in other ways, too. Rossetti uses the stately, familiar meter known as iambic pentameter (five-beat lines that follow an unstressed-stressed rhythm: da-DUM, da-DUM). However, she occasionally varies the meter for emphasis. For example, she begins these first two lines with trochees (stressed-unstressed feet) rather than iambs (unstressed-stressed), accentuating the word "Come" and making the speaker's pleas sound more forceful:

> Come to | me in | the si- | lence of | the night;
> Come in | the spea- | king si- | lence of | a dream;

The poem also follows an ABABCC rhyme scheme, which adds to its lyricism and emotional force. Together, these various sound effects create euphony: the poem is richly melodious and

pleasing to read aloud.

LINES 3-6

Come with soft rounded cheeks and eyes as bright
As sunlight on a stream;
Come back in tears,
O memory, hope, love of finished years.

In lines 3-4, the speaker keeps begging their lover to visit them in dreams. Line 3 picks up on the anaphora ("Come [...] Come") of the previous lines:

> Come with soft rounded cheeks and eyes as bright
> As sunlight on a stream;

This anaphora creates a building momentum and sense of urgency. The speaker is so filled with longing that it seems they might burst.

Meanwhile, the imagery here is clear and vivid. "Soft rounded cheeks" suggest youth, perhaps indicating that the lover died young, or just that the speaker *remembers* them as young and vibrant. The simile "eyes as bright / As sunlight on a stream" is flattering and romantic; it hints that the lover's gaze or overall appearance was dazzling. It may also allude to the Echo and Narcissus myth, in which Narcissus, cursed to fall in love with his own reflection in a pool, wastes away staring at his image while Echo wastes away staring at *him*. If so, the allusion again points to the speaker's longing and inability to actually reach their lover.

There's more sibilance in these lines ("soft," "cheeks," "sunlight on a stream"), as well as continued /m/ and /n/ consonance ("Come," "rounded," "sunlight," "stream"). The ongoing euphony contributes to the poem's earnest, intimate tone; the poem sounds pleasing in much the same way a sad love song does.

In lines 5-6, the speaker almost seems to address their happy *memories* of the lover rather than the lover themselves:

> Come back in tears,
> O memory, hope, love of finished years.

The speaker knows they can't resurrect the deceased, but "memory" can bring back the "hope" and "love" the couple shared. Whereas these feelings were once pure bliss, however, they now "Come back" accompanied by "tears"—can only be bittersweet now that the lover is gone.

There's a formal quirk in these lines as well. While most of the poem is written in iambic pentameter, the fourth and fifth lines of each stanza are split into a line of trimeter and a line of dimeter:

> As sun- | light on | a stream;
> Come back | in tears,

This quirk doesn't really disrupt the poem's rhythm, since, when read aloud, these two lines sound like a single line of pentameter. Visually, however, the added white space slows the reader down, focusing their attention on particular words and images (in this case, the two watery images of "stream" and "tears"). Notice, too, how the spondee in line 5 (the two consecutive stressed syllables of "Come back") adds even more emphasis to the speaker's plea.

LINES 7-9

Oh dream how sweet, too sweet, too bitter sweet,
Whose wakening should have been in Paradise,
Where souls brimful of love abide and meet;

In the second stanza, the speaker describes the dream in which their beloved visits them as "sweet, too sweet, too bitter sweet." The progression from "sweet" to "bitter sweet" reflects the speaker's realization that, no matter how wonderful it is to see their loved one in dreams, these dreams can only ever dissolve into the reality of waking life.

The rhythm created by caesura (the commas after "sweet" and "too sweet") evokes the speaker's gradually unfolding disappointment, as the joy of the dream reunion turns to pain upon waking. At the same time, epistrophe (the repetition of "sweet" at the ends of clauses) emphasizes the speaker's enjoyment, suggesting that no matter how painful it is to wake, the speaker welcomes the temporary relief these dreams provide.

Rather than the reality in which their beloved is dead, the speaker wants to wake in "Paradise, / Where souls brimful of love abide and meet." In other words, they long to rejoin their lover in heaven, where souls, still brimming with the love they felt in life, can find each other again. Rossetti, who was raised Anglo-Catholic, is alluding here to the Christian concept of "Paradise." She may even be alluding to Italian poet Dante Alighieri's masterpiece, *The Divine Comedy*, in which the poet passes through Hell and Purgatory before his beloved leads him to Paradise. Regardless, the speaker is waiting for death to take them away from the painful life they lead without their lover.

A combination of /w/ alliteration ("wakening," "Where") and /l/ consonance ("souls brimful of love") gives these lines a pleasing, musical flow. The liquid /l/ sounds, in particular, evoke the overflowing love the speaker is describing.

LINES 10-12

Where thirsting longing eyes
Watch the slow door
That opening, letting in, lets out no more.

The speaker imagines their lover "Watch[ing]" for them in Paradise with "thirsting longing eyes," waiting for them to enter "the slow door / That opening, letting in, lets out no more." This "slow door" is a metaphor for death. The only way to enter

"Paradise" is by dying, and once a soul arrives there, they can't return to the land of the living. The door is "slow" in the sense that death is often a gradual process, and also in the sense that the couple's wait for their reunion seems terribly long.

Notice the *lack* of a caesura in the phrase "thirsting longing eyes." By omitting the comma that would normally follow "thirsting," Rossetti evokes the eager impatience with which the lover's "eyes"—and the eyes of other dead souls waiting for their loved ones—gaze at heaven's door.

Lines 10-12 are enjambed, an unusual effect in a poem whose lines are mostly end-stopped:

> Where thirsting longing **eyes**
> **Watch** the slow **door**
> **That** opening, letting in, lets out no more.

Enjambment, too, speeds these lines up, evoking the lover's excitement as they watch for the speaker's arrival. These lines' fluid movement mimics the way someone's "thirsting longing eyes" would follow every movement of the "door" in hopes of seeing their loved one walk through.

The fluidity of lines 10-11 makes the caesuras in line 12 stand out all the more:

> That **opening, letting in, lets** out no more.

Whereas enjambment speeds the language up, caesura slows it down, reflecting the "slow" motion of heaven's door—and drawing out the sense of agonizing anticipation.

LINES 13-16

> *Yet come to me in dreams, that I may live*
> *My very life again though cold in death:*
> *Come back to me in dreams, that I may give*
> *Pulse for pulse, breath for breath:*

Even though the speaker knows their dreams won't *really* reunite them with their lover, they long for the brief, illusory reprieve in which they get to "live / [Their] very life again." These dreams may be painful to wake up from, but they serve an important purpose: they let the speaker recapture some of the love, hope, and happiness they once enjoyed in reality.

Indeed, the speaker feels *alive* in these dreams, whereas, in their waking life, they feel "cold in death." Unlike their lover, the speaker isn't literally dead; they're just metaphorically numb, overwhelmed by grief. This metaphor aligns with the poem's title: prolonged mourning has made the speaker feel like a walking corpse, or a mere "Echo" of their former self.

And so the speaker pleads for renewed vitality: "Come back to me in dreams, that I may give / Pulse for pulse, breath for breath." The repetition of "Come [...] to me" in lines 13 and 15—which echoes the repetition of "Come" throughout the first stanza—brings the poem full circle. The speaker is still desperately apostrophizing, begging their lover to return. And for a few hours each night, they get their wish: dreams bring their lover (and, by extension, themselves) back to life.

Notice the repetition of "Pulse" and "breath" (examples of the device called diacope), as well as the repetition of root words in "live [...] life" (an example of polyptoton). This emphasis on words related to *vitality* suggests, again, that the speaker needs to commune with their lover in order to feel alive. These repetitions are also "Echo[es]," as in the poem's title. They drive home the idea that the speaker's dreams are just reverberations of a lost happiness—though they're better than nothing at all.

LINES 17-18

> *Speak low, lean low,*
> *As long ago, my love, how long ago.*

As the poem ends, the speaker urges their lover to "Speak low, lean low," as they did "long ago." These instructions sound almost erotic, as if the speaker is recalling times when their lover leaned close and whispered in their ear. The sensuous phrasing reflects the speaker's desire to touch, feel, and hear their lover; they want these dreams to feel as real as possible.

Diacope (the repetition of "low") draws attention to the speaker's desire for intimacy. "Low" has two separate meanings here (to "speak low" is to speak softly; to "lean low" is to lean down or close), but in both cases, it suggests physical proximity. The speaker wants to be *close* to their lover again, no matter how briefly.

Caesuras slow the language down, allowing readers to savor and absorb the poem's conclusion:

> Speak **low, lean** low,
> As long **ago, my love, how** long ago.

This slowing-down suggests that the speaker is trailing off into memory. The caesuras after "low" and "ago" also highlight the internal rhyme between them, making these final lines sound lush, lyrical, and emotionally charged. Alliteration adds to the lyricism, too:

> Speak low, lean low,
> As long ago, my love, how long ago.

Since /l/ and /o/ sounds are elongated, their abundance here seems to stretch out the ending. It's as if the echoes of the past are gradually fading out. Meanwhile, the repetition of "long ago" emphasizes that the speaker is clinging to the *distant* past—perhaps at the cost of their happiness in the present.

POETIC DEVICES

REPETITION

"Echo" is full of repetition—fittingly enough, considering that an echo is itself a repetition!

The first stanza, for example, repeats the word "silence" (lines 1-2) and introduces the word "dream," which comes back as "dreams" in the third stanza. These repetitions create a hushed, ghostly atmosphere that hangs over the poem as a whole. They also highlight the fact that the beloved now exists *only* in silent dreams; the couple can no longer enjoy the normal interactions they once shared.

The first stanza also contains anaphora: the repetition of "Come" at the beginning of lines 1-3 and 5 (later echoed in lines 13 and 15). This anaphora creates an insistent, propulsive rhythm, pulling the reader into the poem and conveying the speaker's desperation to see their loved one.

The second stanza begins with diacope (the close repetition of "too") and epistrophe (the repetition of "sweet" at the end of successive phrases):

> Oh dream how sweet, too sweet, too bitter sweet,

Through these repetitions, the speaker seems to revise or correct themselves, complicating their initial description of the dream. What first seemed "sweet" becomes "too sweet," then "too bitter sweet," as the speaker wakes up and realizes they've been dreaming. The reunion with their lover was only an illusion, a fantasy too good to be true.

Anaphora also appears in the speaker's description of "Paradise" (lines 9-10):

> Where souls brimful of love abide and meet;
> Where thirsting longing eyes
> Watch the slow door [...]

The insistent repetition again conveys yearning: heaven is "Where" the speaker longs to go in order to be with their lover.

Line 12, in the same stanza, contains polyptoton:

> That opening, letting in, lets out no more.

The speaker repeats the root word "let" in order to draw a simple contrast: the door of Paradise lets souls "in" but doesn't let them "out" again.

The final stanza also features various kinds of repetition. It echoes words like "come" and "dream"/"dreams" from earlier stanzas, keeping the poem's core ideas fresh in the reader's mind. Lines 13-14 contain another example of polyptoton ("live"/"life"), while line 16 contains diacope and parallelism:

> "Pulse for pulse, breath for breath."

Notice how most of these repeated words involve life and vitality. By emphasizing them, the speaker suggests that their life force is entwined with their lover's; in the lover's absence, they feel "cold in death." Similarly, the lover can live again only in the speaker's dreams, as though the speaker has the power to breathe life into them.

Finally, the last two lines of the poem contain diacope and epistrophe:

> Speak low, lean low,
> As long ago, my love, how long ago.

The repetition here adds both rhythm and emphasis. Notice that "low" and "ago" form an internal rhyme, making these last lines even more musical than the rest of the poem. Ultimately, all this repetition drives home the idea that the speaker is stuck in the past, desperately clinging to the "Echo" of their former happiness.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Come," "silence"
- **Line 2:** "Come," "silence," "dream"
- **Line 3:** "Come"
- **Line 5:** "Come"
- **Line 7:** "dream," "sweet," "too," "sweet," "too," "sweet"
- **Line 9:** "Where"
- **Line 10:** "Where"
- **Line 12:** "letting," "lets"
- **Line 13:** "come," "dreams," "live"
- **Line 14:** "life"
- **Line 15:** "Come," "dreams"
- **Line 16:** "Pulse," "pulse," "breath," "breath"
- **Line 17:** "low," "low"
- **Line 18:** "long ago," "long ago"

CAESURA

Caesura helps control the poem's pacing, slowing the language and adding emphasis at key moments. For instance, in line 6, caesura helps emphasize three thematically important words (the ones on either side of the commas):

> O memory, hope, love of finished years.

"Memory, hope, love" pretty much sums up the speaker's psychological state! Later, the caesuras in line 7 help convey the speaker's changing feelings about their dream:

> Oh dream how sweet, too sweet, too bitter sweet,

These pauses sound hesitant, faltering, as though the speaker is

only just waking to find that the "sweet" dream was "bitter[ly]" unreal. They mirror the unfolding of the speaker's thoughts, as though the reader is experiencing this disappointment right along with them.

The last stanza contains much more caesura than the rest of the poem, slowing the reader down as the poem approaches its conclusion. The last three lines, in particular, are full of pauses, and so feel particularly drawn-out and climactic:

> Pulse for **pulse, breath** for breath:
> Speak **low, lean** low,
> As long **ago, my love, how** long ago.

The slower pace also gives the lines a wistful, reflective tone. Commas fall after, and thereby emphasize, several of the stanza's repeated words ("pulse," "low," "ago"), again evoking the "Echo" in the title.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 6:** "memory, hope, love"
- **Line 7:** "sweet, too," "sweet, too"
- **Line 12:** "opening, letting," "in, lets"
- **Line 13:** "dreams, that"
- **Line 15:** "dreams, that"
- **Line 16:** "pulse, breath"
- **Line 17:** "low, lean"
- **Line 18:** "ago, my," "love, how"

ALLITERATION

Alliteration (along with consonance and assonance) helps create the poem's soft, lyrical, dreamy sound. Lines 1-4, for instance, contain lots of whispery /s/ alliteration:

> Come to me in the **s**ilence of the night;
> Come in the **s**peaking **s**ilence of a dream;
> Come with **s**oft rounded cheeks and eyes as bright
> As **s**unlight on a **s**tream;

In addition to sibilance, these lines contain muted /m/ and /n/ consonance ("Come," "silence," "night," "dream," "rounded," "sunlight," "stream"). Together with the poem's meter and rhyme scheme, these pleasant sounds create an overall euphony, which helps evoke the speaker's enjoyment of their dreams.

Similarly, the second stanza contains soft /w/ alliteration ("**w**akening," "**W**here," "**w**atch") and fluid /l/ alliteration ("**l**ove," "**l**onging," "**l**etting," "**l**ets"), as well as /l/ consonance ("brimful**l**," "**s**low"). These musical, drawn-out /l/ sounds intensify the speaker's description of "Paradise," where they long to be reunited with their love.

There's also some prominent /l/ alliteration in the last two lines of the poem:

> Speak **l**ow, **l**ean **l**ow,
> As **l**ong ago, my **l**ove, how **l**ong ago.

Here, too, the liquid, drawn-out, harmonious /l/ sounds seem to evoke the speaker's "long ago" pleasure. Long /o/ assonance ("**l**ow," "**a**go") and repetition also help make these closing lines beautiful and memorable.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "silence"
- **Line 2:** "speaking," "silence"
- **Line 3:** "soft"
- **Line 4:** "sunlight," "stream"
- **Line 8:** "wakening"
- **Line 9:** "Where," "love"
- **Line 10:** "Where," "longing"
- **Line 11:** "Watch"
- **Line 12:** "letting," "lets"
- **Line 13:** "me," "may," "live"
- **Line 14:** "My," "life," "cold," "death"
- **Line 15:** "Come," "dreams"
- **Line 17:** "low," "lean," "low"
- **Line 18:** "long," "love," "long"

METAPHOR

The poem's metaphors help illustrate the speaker's prolonged grief.

The most important metaphor appears in the poem's title: "Echo." On the literal level, an echo is a reverberating sound that gets weaker over time. As a metaphor, it suggests that the speaker's memories are feeble and muted compared to the actual moments they shared with their lover. It also suggests that, by dwelling more and more on past happiness as a refuge from their current pain, the *speaker* has become an echo of their former self. Since the word "echo" appears only in the title, however, Rossetti lets readers make these connections on their own.

In line 9, "brimful of love" is a mini-metaphor: it compares "souls" in heaven to cups or vessels running over with love. Later in the same stanza, the speaker describes "the slow door" of Paradise, which, "opening, letting in, lets out no more." This "door," of course, alludes to religious depictions of heaven or paradise (e.g., St. Peter's gate in the Christian tradition). But it's also simply a metaphor for death; once someone dies, they can't return to the land of the living. Death may come "slow[ly]," but it's permanent.

In lines 13-14, the speaker describes themselves as "cold in death." Unlike their lover, who is literally deceased, the speaker is only metaphorically dead. In their lover's absence, they've

gone emotionally numb; the world has lost all its flavor. Only in dreams are they able to feel happiness and hope again.

In addition to these metaphors, there's a simile in lines 3-4, which describe the lover's "eyes as bright / As sunlight on a stream." This comparison implies that the lover's gaze (in dreams) is beautiful, joyful, and compelling. It also subtly recalls the Greek myth of Echo and Narcissus: Narcissus fell in love while gazing at his own reflection in water, and so had no interest in Echo's love for him. This allusion might serve as a reminder that the lover can't actually hear the speaker's pleas; they're as unreachable as Narcissus.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Line 9:** "souls brimful of love"
- **Lines 11-12:** "the slow door / That opening, letting in, lets out no more"
- **Lines 13-14:** "that I may live / My very life again though cold in death"

APOSTROPHE

Throughout the poem, the speaker addresses their lost love via apostrophe.

The speaker's lover or spouse has died and—according to the speaker—gone through "the slow door" of "Paradise." The speaker begs this person to return to them in dreams, so they can relive old times together.

For the most part, the speaker addresses the lover directly, urging them to "Come to me in the silence of the night," "come to me in dreams," "Speak low," and so on. The last line of the poem is the most explicit, as the speaker calls this absent person "my love."

Yet the speaker, at times, seems to be addressing not so much the beloved as the lost joy and romance they shared. At the end of the first stanza, for instance, the speaker says:

> Come back in tears,
> O memory, hope, love of finished years.

The speaker might be calling the lover the "love" and "hope" of their lives, or they might be addressing the "years" themselves. Regardless, they're mourning not only their lover but the happiness their life once contained. Grief has turned their life into a weak "Echo" of what it once was.

Overall, apostrophe makes the reader feel like a fly on the wall of the speaker's private thoughts. The poem is essentially a love letter that the reader is privy to, and this sense of intimacy makes the speaker's pain all the more vivid.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Come to me"
- **Lines 5-6:** "Come back in tears, / O memory, hope, love of finished years."
- **Line 13:** "Yet come to me in dreams"
- **Line 15:** "Come back to me in dreams"
- **Lines 17-18:** "Speak low, lean low, / As long ago, my love, how long ago."

ALLUSION

The poem subtly alludes to the Greek myth of Echo and Narcissus, another story of tragic love and longing.

Echo was a nymph cursed by the goddess Venus. As a result of her curse, she could only repeat the last few words of other people's sentences; she couldn't start any of her own. One day, she fell in love with a youth named Narcissus, but she couldn't talk to him; she could only *echo* him, which he found repulsive. Later, Narcissus fell victim to his own curse, becoming infatuated with his own reflection on the surface of a pool. Unable to stop staring at his beautiful image, he withered away by the side of the water, and Echo, unable to stop loving him, withered away with him.

The poem isn't *about* Echo and Narcissus, but the idea of pining for someone who can't see or hear you is central to both the myth and the poem. The speaker imagines their lover's "eyes as bright / As sunlight on a stream," an image which might evoke Narcissus gazing at himself on the surface of the water. Of course, the speaker's beloved isn't self-absorbed, just deceased.

There's another *possible* allusion in line 8, when the speaker says they should have "waken[ed]" from their dream into "Paradise." Rossetti, raised Anglo-Catholic, is nodding here to the Christian concept of heaven. She also studied the works of Dante Alighieri, including his famous epic poem, *The Divine Comedy*. In this poem, the poet travels through Hell before encountering the woman he loves, who shows him the way to Paradise. For the grieving, waking life is its own sort of hell, and unlike the narrator of Dante's epic, Rossetti's speaker is unable to escape it.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Lines 3-4:** "eyes as bright / As sunlight on a stream"
- **Line 8:** "Whose wakening should have been in Paradise"

VOCABULARY

Brimful (Line 9) - Filled to the brim or overflowing.

Abide (Line 9) - Persist or continue on. (In other words, these "souls" live on in heaven, a.k.a. "Paradise.")

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Echo" contains 18 lines arranged into three rhymed sestets (six-line stanzas). Each sestet begins with three longer (pentameter) lines, followed by two shorter lines and a final longer line.

The consistency of stanza length, line lengths, and rhyme scheme makes each stanza seem to "Echo" the one before, reinforcing the poem's main metaphor. Like an echo, the speaker is stuck repeating the past, unable to move forward in life. The poem's structure conveys this idea neatly and effectively. The harmonious stanzas also add to the poem's balance and beauty, which, in turn, reflects the beauty of the speaker's memories.

METER

"Echo" is mostly written in iambic pentameter, meaning that its lines generally contain five *iambs* (feet that follow an unstressed-stressed rhythm). However, Rossetti frequently swaps in other kinds of feet to add emphasis and variation. For instance, the first three lines are in iambic pentameter, but they all begin with trochees (stressed-unstressed):

> Come to | me in | the sil- | ence of | the night;
> Come in | the speak- | ing sil- | ence of | a dream
> Come with | soft round- | ed cheeks | and eyes | as bright

Iambic pentameter gives these lines a pleasing, beautiful rhythm, while the opening trochees make them more emphatic: the speaker desperately wants to their loved one to come back in dreams.

The fourth and fifth lines of each stanza are written in iambic trimeter and dimeter, respectively. This means that instead of five iambs per line, they contain, respectively, three iambs and two iambs. When mashed together, these lines of trimeter and dimeter equal a single line of pentameter, so when the poem is read aloud, its rhythm sounds more consistent than it looks. Here's how this pattern plays out in lines 4 and 5:

> As sun- | light on | a stream;
> Come back | in tears,

Note that line 5 begins with a strong spondee (two stressed syllables in a row), again emphasizing the speaker's desire for their beloved to return.

In fact, spondees tend to appear at strategic moments, as in line 6:

> O mem- | ory, | hope, love | of fin- | ished years

Fittingly, the rhythm stresses and links two strong emotions: "hope" and "love." A similar effect occurs in line 16:

> Pulse for | pulse, breath | for breath:

Here, only the third foot is an iamb. The first is a trochee, which again sounds propulsive and emphatic, and the second is a spondee, which ties together the words "pulse" and "breath." Linking them rhythmically suggests that, just as the pulse and breath are inseparable parts of life, the speaker still feels inseparable from their beloved. (Notice, too, how the phrase "Pulse for pulse" has a stressed-unstressed-stressed rhythm that *sounds* like a pulse!)

Rossetti's deft use of meter results in a beautiful, melodic poem whose rhythmic variations reinforce its imagery and ideas.

RHYME SCHEME

The poem follows a straightforward, consistent rhyme scheme: ABABCC DEDEFF GHGHII.

This pattern makes the poem musical and memorable, like a tragic love song about parted lovers. It's also fitting, of course, that a poem called "Echo" should rhyme, since rhyme words echo one another's sounds!

Most of the poem's rhymes are exact ("night"/"bright," "dream"/"stream," etc.), making its structure harmonious and easy to hear. In fact, there's only one slant rhyme, in lines 8 and 10: "Paradise"/"eyes." This slightly imperfect rhyme draws subtle attention, perhaps, to the speaker's disappointment about not waking up in heaven with their beloved.

SPEAKER

The speaker of "Echo" is someone whose beloved died, seemingly "long ago." Yet despite the time that's passed, the speaker hasn't let go of this person and moved on with their life. Instead, they look forward to sleep each night, when they get the chance to see this person and re-experience the love and happiness they felt with them.

The poem doesn't reveal any personal information about the speaker, such as their age, gender, race, location, etc. That the speaker could be anyone, at any point in their life, makes the poem all the more relatable. The speaker's yearning to wake up in "Paradise," though, does suggest that they're religious; Rossetti herself was a devout Anglo-Catholic.

SETTING

The poem doesn't have a physical setting; it takes place entirely in the speaker's thoughts. The speaker is anticipating the arrival of "night," when their departed loved one will return to them in the "silence" of dreams.

The *lack* of a clear setting helps create the poem's dreamlike atmosphere. It's as if the speaker no longer fully exists in the present, because they're too caught up in happy memories and fantasies. Indeed, the only *place* the poem describes is heaven: the "Paradise" where lost souls meet, and where the speaker hopes to find their lover after death. Otherwise, the speaker dwells in the "memory, hope, love of finished years."

These details reinforce the idea that the speaker has become an "Echo" of their former self. If their memories are the only place worth living, then it's their real life that has become a sort of terrible dream.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Christina Rossetti (1830-1894) was an important Victorian poet. The daughter of an artistic Italian family, Rossetti was born in England and began her career young; she wrote "Song (When I am dead, my dearest)" when she was only 18 and "Remember" when she was 19. She wrote "Echo" in 1854, when she was 24 years old. All three poems appeared in her first commercially printed poetry collection, *The Goblin Market and Other Poems*, in 1862. (An earlier volume of her verses had been privately printed.)

Many of Rossetti's poems focus on mortality, religious devotion, and the complexities of women's lives in a conservative Victorian society. She has often been compared to her predecessor Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose work shares some similarities with Rossetti's. However, Rossetti's work is generally considered more plainspoken and less political in its language and ideas. Her other influences include Dante and Petrarch (her father's ties to Italy meant that she was well-schooled in Italian forms such as the Petrarchan sonnet), the Bible, and fairy tales and folklore.

Rossetti wrote more than a dozen books in her lifetime. Feminist scholarship sparked a resurgence of critical interest in her work towards the end of the 20th century. Part of her mass appeal stems from what her brother, the famed Pre-Raphaelite artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti, described as her talent for "artless art"—that is, art that appears simple and uncontrived on the surface, but is effective, moving, and nuanced when readers dig deeper.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Rossetti lived in a world defined by drastic, revolutionary change and by the conservative backlash that followed.

England reinvented itself under Queen Victoria, cementing its status as the center of the world's most powerful empire. Even as this period ushered in a great deal of innovation and expansion (often through colonial violence), it saw a return to traditional family values. English women of the "Victorian age" were expected to conform to strict expectations regarding everything from education to sexuality and marriage. Christian piety was the norm in public life (and in literature, too; notice the description of "Paradise" in lines 8-12 here). In spite of—or, perhaps, in reaction to—these restrictive norms, female writers such as Rossetti began to write about (and receive popular and critical recognition for) their own lives, affirming the significance of women's experiences.

Rossetti's work was part of a tide of bold and moving poetry and fiction by Victorian women. Charlotte and Emily Brontë and Elizabeth Barrett Browning are only a few of the writers whose work achieved contemporary recognition against the odds.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- A Recording of the Poem — Listen to the poem read aloud by poet Arthur L. Wood. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ImnqF94ePU4)
- The Poet's Life and Work — Read a Poetry Foundation biography of Rossetti. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/christina-rossetti)
- An Early Printing of Goblin Market — Look through scans of an early edition of Rossetti's collection Goblin Market, in which this poem originally appeared. (https://archive.org/details/rossettigoblinmarket/page/80/mode/2up)
- Christina Rossetti among the Pre-Raphaelites — Explore the artistic and literary context in which Christina Rossetti worked. (https://www.apollo-magazine.com/christina-rossetti-and-pre-raphaelite-art/)
- The Myth of Echo and Narcissus — Learn about the Greek myth the poem alludes to. (https://www.greeklegendsandmyths.com/echo-and-narcissus.html)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER CHRISTINA ROSSETTI POEMS

- An Apple Gathering
- Cousin Kate
- In an Artist's Studio
- Maude Clare
- No, Thank You, John
- Remember
- Sister Maude
- Song (When I am dead, my dearest)

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