Remember

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 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

Remember me when I'm no longer around, having gone far away into death's silent land; when you can't hold my hand anymore, and when I can no longer make as if I'm leaving, and then turn back and stay after all. Remember me when you can no longer tell me about all your future plans for us. Just remember me; you understand that it'll be too late then to give me advice or to pray for me. But if you do forget me for a while, and then remember me again later, don't feel bad. Because as long as darkness and rot don't destroy the traces of my thoughts in you, it'll much better for you to forget about me and be happy than to remember me and be sad.

THEMES

LOVE, MEMORY, AND GRIEF

In "Remember," a speaker entreats a loved one to remember her after her death. At the same time, however, the speaker insists that her beloved shouldn't feel bad about it if he forgets her for a little while: so long as she's had some permanent influence on him, it's ultimately better for him to forget about her and be happy than to remember her and be sad. The poem thus explores the poignant push-pull of grief: while the speaker wishes to remain forever with her love in some way, she also doesn't want her absence to cause him pain. In the end, the poem suggests that what truly matters to her is that she shape her beloved, becoming a part of him through her influence on his life—and in doing so, become a subtle presence rather than a constantly remembered absence.

The first lines cast the speaker's death in terms of what she and her beloved won't be able to do any more when she's dead and the only way they can come in contact is through memory. The speaker first imagines her death as a journey to a "silent land," a place that takes both her body and her voice away from her love. Here there is no way for them to communicate, to make plans, to help each other, or simply to be with each other. Memory will be all that's left to the beloved, then, and the speaker insists that he should cling to it.

Yet, soon enough, the speaker later tempers her insistence. If her lover forgets to do this remembering for a while, he shouldn't feel guilty—so long as she remains present to him in other ways. What really matters to the speaker is that, in her absence, she should remain to her beloved as "a vestige of the thoughts that once I had"—an influencing presence, maybe not recognized, but still alive in the beloved's mind. As long as she lives on in this way, it's better for her lover to be happy with her forgotten presence than sad about her remembered absence.

That said, the speaker isn't quite all the way to hoping that her beloved can forget her and be happy without her forever! She imagines him forgetting her only for "a while." Either through her influence or her memory, she means to be a permanent part of her beloved's life; what matters is that their connection can outlast death.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2

Remember me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land;

"Remember" begins with simple immediacy, as the speaker addresses her listener with one straightforward demand: *remember me when I'm dead*. But the way she imagines her death tells readers a lot about why it's so important to her that she be remembered.

Death, to this speaker, is a country. She imagines it as "the silent land," "far away": not just remote, but speechless. No messages can travel to or from this soundless place. Where some might imagine death as a place from which they can watch over their

living loved ones, this speaker frames it as a place of complete disconnection.

The anadiplosis of these first lines emphasizes the distance and disconnect of death: the speaker won't just be gone, she'll be "gone away, / Gone far away." Even the way she uses the word "gone" underlines her point. She imagines gone-ness as a state of being: she doesn't say "remember me after I go away," but "when I am gone away," as if her very self will become a vacancy after her death.

These lines make clear that the poem is an apostrophe, a direct address to someone. While the reader doesn't know who this person might be, these first lines create the strong sense that it's someone the speaker feels very closely connected to—so closely connected, in fact, that the thought that he might forget her when death separates them necessitates a whole poem!

The reader may also begin to get some hints about the addressee's identity when they notice that this poem is a Petrarchan sonnet—a form strongly associated with love poetry. (See the "Form" section for more on this.)

LINES 3-4

When you can no more hold me by the hand,
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.

The speaker elaborates on the world after her death, this time through images from the world of the living. In these lines, the speaker imagines what she and her beloved *can* do now. While the first lines have introduced death as "the silent land"—suggesting, by contrast, that the world of the living is a world of speech and sound—the speaker in these lines emphasizes physical touch and presence.

Her language mirrors her thoughts. The alliterative /h/ sounds in "hold me by the hand" link the words just like the hands they describe. And the repetition of "Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay" itself turns and returns, just as the speaker imagines starting to leave and then turning right back to stay with her beloved a little while longer. The speaker evokes contact and presence only to undo it: these warmly-imagined moments are precisely the things she and her beloved won't be able to do when she's gone to the "silent land."

The poem's rhyme scheme similarly plays off its meaning. Like every Petrarchan sonnet, this poem uses an ABBA pattern in its first two quatrains—a pattern of going away and then coming back again. There's something poignant in that movement here. The speaker's whole point is that, after her death, she'll no longer be able to return. But memory can bring her back to her beloved, just as the rhymes reflect and return.

LINES 5-6

Remember me when no more day by day
You tell me of our future that you plann'd:

Moving into the second quatrain, the speaker shifts her perspective a little. In the first lines, she's emphasized the ways in which she won't be able to communicate with her beloved after her death; now, she thinks more about how her beloved won't be able to communicate with her.

Time is important in these lines. The speaker emphasizes the way that time looks to the living in the diacope of "day by day." She herself won't be participating in the forward march of days when she's gone. Similarly, her alliteration on flat /oo/ sounds draws together the words "you" and "future." Her beloved won't be able to tell her of that intended future, because only *he* will be present there: "you" has a future, the speaker does not, and his efforts to tell her of "our" future will be fruitless.

These are particularly poignant lines. They suggest a young couple getting ready for a whole life together—a life that the speaker suggests is in no way guaranteed.

But what's really important to her is that, even if these plans are thwarted, her beloved still remember her. She begins this quatrain exactly the same way as she began the last one: "Remember me." Those words will recur and recur throughout the poem, echoing the words of the Ghost in *Hamlet*—a spectral speaker reaching out from beyond the grave. A big part of remembering, it seems, is remembering to remember.

LINES 7-8

Only remember me; you understand
It will be late to counsel then or pray.

Here, the speaker insists even more emphatically that being remembered is all she desires. Her language is deceptively simple: "Only remember me."

These few words could mean a number of different things:

- Remember me and me alone.
- Just remember me, that's all.
- Remember me in spite of everything.

These complex layers of meaning, all dependent on that one word "only," tell the reader something important about the speaker: her words are literally *deep*, working on many levels at once.

This effect is only strengthened by the words with which she closes this quatrain: "you understand / It will be late to counsel then or pray." These are pretty strong words, suggesting that no form of communication, not even prayer, will reach her once she's dead. Memory, and *only* memory, will be the one point of connection left to her. The subtle assonance between "late" and "pray" adds musicality to the line as it speeds forward.

Taken together, these first two quatrains—each using that mirroring, repeating, returning ABBA rhyme scheme—present a not-altogether-straightforward message. The speaker wants her beloved to remember her, that's clear enough. But there's a lot of hidden complexity here. If death separates her so

emphatically from her beloved, why does it matter to her to know that he'll remember her? Whose purposes does this remembering serve? There's the implication here that, even if the speaker is "gone far away into the silent land," she'll still have enough consciousness to care what's on her beloved's mind.

LINES 9-10

Yet if you should forget me for a while
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:

In these lines, this sonnet comes to its volta—that is, the moment when the poem's train of thought changes course, and the speaker introduces a new idea. Here, that change is a bold one. The speaker has just spent the first octet (that is, the first eight lines) telling her beloved to remember her at all costs, that this will be the only thing left to them when she's dead. Now she turns back on her idea, just like she imagined physically turning back to her beloved: "Yet if you should forget me for a while [...]"

This is a pretty big change! But perhaps not as big as it seems at first:

> Yet if you should forget me for a while
> And afterwards remember, do not grieve:

Sure, her beloved shouldn't feel bad if he forgets her *for a while*, just so long as he remembers again afterwards. Regardless, it's not a small change to go from insisting on memory and only memory at all costs to admitting that, life being what it is, her beloved probably *will* forget her for a while, from time to time. The speaker here tempers her intensity with a humane realism. She doesn't wish her beloved to feel guilty or mournful, even if he can't always do the one thing she wants him to do when she's gone.

The changed thought goes along with a changed rhyme scheme. Where the first two stanzas, with their emphasis on return (or the lack thereof) and remembering, used a regular ABBA rhyme scheme, here something more complicated begins. The rhymes in the final sestet (that is, the last six lines) will run like this: CDD ECE. This irregular but ultimately harmonious pattern fits right in with the speaker's gentler, more flexible, more complicated frame of mind.

LINES 11-14

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.

Concluding, the speaker explains why her beloved shouldn't grieve if he forgets her for a moment. If there's still some trace of her in his mind, she says, it's better that he should forget her and be happy than remember her and be sad; she'll always have some kind of influence on him, even if he doesn't consciously know it. If her *thoughts* have shaped his, she'll live in him forever.

On the surface level, the way the speaker communicates this subtle and loving idea seems simple. The last words of the two last lines are childlike in their plainness: it's better for her lover to "smile" than to "be sad." The parallelism in lines 13 and 14 underlines that simplicity, linking forgetting to smiling and remembering to sadness with a plain, sing-songy logic.

But the *shape* of these final few lines enriches them with all sorts of deeper meaning. First off, consider the enjambment between lines 11 and 12:

> For if the darkness and corruption leave
> A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,

Because of the way the line breaks right in the middle of a sentence here, a potential double meaning forms. Before the reader moves from line 11 to line 12, there's a split second in which line 11 might mean something very different: "If the darkness and corruption *themselves go away*," rather than "If the darkness and corruption *leave behind* a trace of my thoughts." In spite of the speaker's earlier talk about the "silent land," there's a hint here of an even happier possibility: that the silent land might not be silent forever, and that the seeming eternities of darkness and corruption might eventually end. And the "thought" the speaker imagines leaving behind is never subject to "corruption": thought can't rot.

That incorruptibility of thought is also one of the poem's big unspoken ideas. For, after all, what is this poem but a message from "the silent land"? The reader might well reflect that this poem's author is indeed dead now—but here are her words, still speaking. A "vestige of the thoughts that once I had" does survive—and not just for her unnamed beloved, but for all who read her sonnet. Not just the love and thought captured in poetry, but poetry itself, can face down death.

POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

Alliteration is one of the most common poetic devices. Those repeating initial sounds don't turn up that often in day-to-day speech, and therefore often makes a poem feel, well, poetic: heightened and artful. But in "Remember," this effect is fairly low-key, gently emphasizing linked ideas.

For instance, take a look at the alliteration on /h/ sounds in lines 3-4:

> When you can no more hold me by the hand,
> Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.

That /h/ is a gentle sound, and it subtly draws together images of touch and connection: holding hands, half-leaving but then turning back to embrace one's beloved again. The soft, repeated sounds suggest the tender affection between the speaker and her beloved.

There's similarly subtle alliteration on /f/ sounds in lines 9 and 13:

> Yet if you should forget me for a while
> [...]
> Better by far you should forget and smile

This is an even quieter effect than before: the /f/ sounds of the words "for" and "far" are especially discreet, since those words are pretty unobtrusive ones. But the connection between those words makes a difference in meaning: connecting "forget" and "for a while" makes it clear that the speaker isn't imagining being forgotten *forever*, and connecting "far" and "forget" emphasizes the speaker's insistence that, really, her beloved's happiness is more important than his constant attention to her memory.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "hold," "hand"
- **Line 4:** "half"
- **Line 5:** "me," "more"
- **Line 9:** "Yet," "you," "forget," "for"
- **Line 13:** "Better by," "far," "forget," "smile"
- **Line 14:** "sad"

ASSONANCE

Assonance, like its cousin alliteration, often appears precisely because it helps to make a poem sound like a poem: the heightened, artful, musical sound assonance provides sets poetic speech apart from everyday speech.

The assonance in this poem is pretty muted and doesn't draw a huge amount of attention to itself, as befits a poem that uses simple language to communicate a simple request. But it does help to draw some meaningful words together. For instance, take a look at line 13:

> Better by far you should forget and smile

Here, assonance on the short /eh/ sounds of "better" and "forget" helps to emphasize that, yes, the speaker really is saying it's better for her beloved should forget her if he's suffering too much grief. The matching long /ay/ sounds of "late" and "pray" in line 8 do similar work, strengthening the association between two meaningful words: while praying might be one of the first solaces to come to her beloved's mind, the speaker makes it clear that such prayers won't do her dead self any particular good.

And, poignantly, the /oo/ sounds in "You tell me of our future" draw together the beloved and the future—a future that the speaker will no longer participate in if she's dead and her beloved is alive. The assonance here thus subtly reflects a bigger part of the poem's meaning.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Remember," "when"
- **Line 3:** "no," "hold"
- **Line 6:** "You," "future," "you"
- **Line 8:** "late," "pray"
- **Line 13:** "Better," "forget"

APOSTROPHE

Apostrophe often plays an important role in sonnets—especially love sonnets, in which the whole point is to address a lover. Here, the whole poem is directed at the speaker's beloved, advising him and consoling him.

The tone of the apostrophe here is at first a kind of warning, even a command. Like Hamlet's ghost, the speaker repeatedly tells her beloved, "Remember me!" (See the Poetic Devices entry on repetition for more on this.) But this poem's commands aren't so dreadful as that ghost's. Rather, the speaker's list of things she and her beloved will no longer be able to do—speak, touch, make plans—is itself a poignant reminder, a catalogue of things that he might want to recall when she's gone.

The speaker's tone takes a turn in the second half of the poem, where she relents a little, understanding that her beloved is pretty likely to forget her for a while at *some* point. But she sweeps up this forgetting in her posthumous instructions, too, kindly telling her beloved, "do not grieve": it's human to forget, and she wants him to be happy.

The apostrophe in this poem thus evokes the tenderness of a loving relationship. The speaker's deep affection for her beloved extends even to forgiveness for forgetting; she knows she'll live on inside this person she's writing to, in one way or another.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Remember me"
- **Line 3:** "you"
- **Line 6:** "You"
- **Line 9:** "you"
- **Line 13:** "you"
- **Line 14:** "you"

CAESURA

Caesuras only turn up twice in this short poem. In both

instances, they do something similar, lending extra emphasis to the moments before and after the pause.

Take a look at line 7, for starters:

> Only remember me; you understand
> It will be late to counsel then or pray.

Here, the punctuation in the middle of the line sets off the words "Only remember me," creating a little pocket of space around them. The speaker has already been repeating and repeating the words "remember me," so the emphasis here is doubly pronounced. But here the words aren't just "remember me," but "*Only* remember me"—a phrasing that, in Rossetti's time, could mean either "Just remember me" or "whatever you do, remember me."

If the speaker means "just remember me," there's a poignant second meaning concealed there: the beloved won't be able to do anything *but* remember her, as all other possibilities are cut off. The caesura gives this extra possible meanings a little more time to hit home.

The second caesura similarly sets off an important idea:

> Yet if you should forget me for a while
> And afterward remember, do not grieve:

Here, the pause at the comma introduces the surprise of a new idea. The speaker has been insisting her beloved should remember her all through the first eight lines of the poem—but now changes her mind, at least a little, telling him he shouldn't feel bad if he doesn't do the thing she's been insisting he should do this whole time. The caesura introduces the new emotional dimension: the note of forgiveness and blessing upon which the poem will end.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 7:** "me; you"
- **Line 10:** "remember, do"

END-STOPPED LINE

The end-stopped lines in "Remember" often connect to the poem's interest in what ends and what stops: life and memory.

Consider, first, the strongest end-stops here: the lines that end with a period. There's one of these at the end of each of the first two quatrains, and one at the very end of the poem. Thus, the end-stops closely follow the poem's pattern of argument and thought. Each of these final periods comes after one full unit of thought: the first quatrain deals with what happens when the speaker can no longer communicate with her lover, the second with what happens when he can't reach out to her, and the third with when, after all, she decides she'll remain with him even if he forgets her. The periods mark the subtle divisions between these steps in the speaker's train of thought.

But there's also a less emphatic stop in the middle of each of these sections. A semicolon or a colon always breaks each of these thought processes into two parts, one that *introduces* a theme and one that *elaborates* on it.

End-stopped lines thus trace the shape of the speaker's developing ideas. First she sees the problem of death from her own perspective, then from the perspective of her beloved—and having seen it from the perspective of her beloved, she can open herself up to a new kind of ending, in which—maybe—she doesn't need to be remembered *all* the time.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "away,"
- **Line 2:** "land;"
- **Line 3:** "hand,"
- **Line 4:** "stay."
- **Line 6:** "plann'd:"
- **Line 8:** "pray."
- **Line 10:** "grieve:"
- **Line 12:** "had,"
- **Line 14:** "sad."

ENJAMBMENT

Enjambment often gives poems a feeling of onward-flowing forward motion. It can also play subtle tricks with each line's meaning. In "Remember," it serves both these purposes.

For instance, take a look at the enjambment between lines 11 and 12:

> For if the darkness and corruption leave
> A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,

Now, notice what happens if one were to cut out line 12 and look at line 11 on its own:

> For if the darkness and corruption leave

The word "leave" in line 11 could, all by its lonesome, mean "if the darkness and corruption *go away*." Of course, the reader reads on fast enough to get the sense the speaker means—that is, "if the darkness and corruption leave a remnant of my thoughts behind." But for just that one little moment, there's a hint at a bigger, happier possibility: maybe this deathly separation *won't* be eternal.

Another notable enjambment comes at the very end:

> Better by far you should forget and smile
> Than that you should remember and be sad.

Here, the sentence crossing over from one line to another gives each of these opposite ideas—forgetting and being happy, remembering and being sad—their own space. This brings home the poem's most humane message: so long as the speaker remains in her beloved somehow, she's willing to relinquish even that remembering she wants most for the sake of his happiness.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-6:** "day / You"
- **Lines 7-8:** "understand / It"
- **Lines 9-10:** "while / And"
- **Lines 11-12:** "leave / A"
- **Lines 13-14:** "smile / Than"

PARADOX

In the second half of this sonnet, the speaker introduces a surprising new idea. Having maintained for the last eight lines that all she wants is for her beloved to remember her when she's dead, she suddenly counters herself: "Yet if you should forget me for a while / And afterwards remember, do not grieve."

This might seem at first to undo all the work of the first half of the poem, but there's a paradox here. In saying that she's fine with the speaker forgetting her as long as some "vestige of the thoughts that once I had" remains with him, the speaker asserts her own permanence even as she imagines being forgotten. The influence she's had on her beloved will live as long as he does, whether or not he knows it.

This points to a larger action of paradox in the poem. The speaker imagines death as "the silent land," a place beyond all communication. But the modern-day reader might reflect that, in reading this poem, they are hearing the voice and the thoughts of a writer who is now long-dead. Through poetry, the "silent land" becomes not so silent after all. The poem's quiet paradox thus supports its bigger ideas of the persistence of memory.

Where Paradox appears in the poem:

- **Lines 9-12:** "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,"

REPETITION

Repetition has a deep thematic importance in this poem, and the different shapes it takes—mostly anaphora and diacope—work in different ways to suggest memory. In a sonnet about memory, it makes sense that the speaker would repeat herself over and over, the way you might remind yourself what you're planning to pick up at the store.

The easiest kind of repetition to spot here is diacope, the straightforward repetition of words at short intervals. For example, the diacope of "day by day" in line 5 emphasizes the passage of time.

The speaker also won't let go of the word "remember": it's not just that she's asking her beloved to remember her, she's asking him to remember to remember! As her reflections in lines 9-14 suggest, she knows that forgetting is natural, a thing that humans are just going to do; remembering to remember is part of remembering *what* you're remembering.

Some diacope on the word "remember" is also anaphora. Both of the first two quatrains begin with the same phrase: "Remember me." This is a phrase with a past: it's famous from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, in which the ghost of Hamlet's father says those same words to his son. This subtle allusion gives the poem a ghostly flavor itself, as if the speaker has already "gone far away into the silent land"—and underlines the poem's power to preserve voice and speech, even after the speaker is dead. (The modern-day reader might reflect that Rossetti *is* speaking from beyond the grave now!)

There's another bit of meaningful repetition in lines 1-2, when the speaker says:

> Remember me when I am gone away,
> Gone far away into the silent land;

And yet another in line 4:

> Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.

These moments do curiously opposite jobs. In lines 1-2, the anadiplosis emphasizes the speaker's isolation from her beloved in death. In line 4, the repetition evokes a moment of human warmth, when, halfway out the door, the living speaker literally "re-turns" to her beloved.

The poem's final two lines also feature parallelism and antithesis, as the speaker presents two opposite scenarios using the same grammatical structure:

> Better by far you should forget and smile
> Than that you should remember and be sad.

The repetitive structure here underscores the differences between these situations and helps readers understand the speaker's logic. If forgetting is linked to happiness, then its opposite—remembrance—is naturally linked to sadness.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Remember," " me"

- **Lines 1-2:** "gone away, / Gone far away"
- **Line 4:** "turn to go yet turning stay"
- **Line 5:** "Remember," " me," "day by day"
- **Line 7:** "remember me"
- **Line 10:** "remember"
- **Line 13:** "you should forget and smile"
- **Line 14:** "you should remember and be sad"

METAPHOR

The "silent land" mentioned in line 1 is a metaphorical (and euphemistic) reference to death. Many writers have imagined death as a country. Here, in picturing death not only as a country but a *silent* one, Rossetti emphasizes the remoteness and inaccessibility of the dead. No speech can make it back to the beloved once the speaker is gone. The metaphor, then, underscores the distance and sense of impassable separation between the speaker and her lover; they can no longer communicate, which is why the speaker implores her lover to remember her.

At the same time, the silence of this silent land might also be broken by the voice of this very poem. Art is one of the ways in which the dead *can* speak, and the very act of writing this poem is something like sending a letter from the "silent land."

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "Gone far away into the silent land"

VOCABULARY

Silent land (Line 2) - While "silent land" could mean different things in different contexts, in this poem it is a metaphor for death.

Counsel (Line 8) - Give advice.

Corruption (Line 11) - Putrefaction, rotting.

Vestige (Line 12) - A little trace.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

This poem is a Petrarchan sonnet, a very old form first developed in medieval Italy. This means its 14 lines can be divided into an opening octave (an eight-line stanza) and closing sestet (a six-line stanza). Based on the poem's rhyme scheme (more on that in "Rhyme Scheme"), the sonnet can further be broken down into two quatrains followed by two tercets.

Typically, a sonnet's octave presents some sort of issue or question to which the sestet then responds. Here, in the octave the speaker implores her beloved to remember her, while the sestet then deals with the opposite scenario: the speaker tells her lover what to do should he forget her.

The moment when the speaker has a change of mind or heart, or introduces a new idea, is called the volta, and in Petrarchan sonnets this usually appears in the first line of the sestet. In this poem, the volta thus turns up exactly where readers would expect it, with the telling word "Yet" in line 9. Finally, sonnets are most commonly associated with love poetry—a tradition this poem fits right into.

METER

This poem is a sonnet, and therefore uses iambic pentameter: a line of five iambs, the metrical foot that goes da-DUM. In context, that sounds like this:

Remem- | ber me | when I | am gone | away,

As many readers have remarked, iambic pentameter sounds a lot like a heartbeat. A sonnet's iambic pentameter is thus perfectly matched to a poem about love and death—both of which have a lot to do with how and whether someone's heart is beating.

The iambic pentameter here isn't perfectly regular, however. Take a look at line 7, which begins with a trochee (DUM-da) rather than an iamb (da-DUM):

Only | remem- | ber me [...]

The same thing happens again in line 13:

Better | by far | you should | forget | and smile

In both of these lines, the shift of emphasis to the front of the first word makes the speaker sound insistent: she's really leaning on these words, making sure her beloved hears and understands her.

RHYME SCHEME

This poem uses the traditional rhyme scheme of a Petrarchan sonnet—or rather, one of several possible variations on that rhyme scheme. Petrarchan sonnets typically start out with pretty regular rhymes, and get a little more complicated in their second halves; this poem is no exception. The rhyme scheme here runs like this:

ABBA ABBA CDD ECE

This movement from the balanced ABBA pattern to the more complicated variation between C, D, and E rhymes in the second part mirrors the poem's thought. Just as the speaker starts out insisting on one thing—that her beloved should remember her—and then moves into the more difficult thought

that her beloved shouldn't feel bad if he forgets her for a while, the rhyme scheme starts out simple and regular and gets knottier.

The vast majority of the rhymes here are on plain, monosyllabic words: land and hand, day and pray, grieve and leave. This simplicity makes the poem feel both sweet and forceful. That last E rhyme, had and sad, isn't dramatic or flowery: it's just plain and poignant. That the speaker only uses those E rhymes in the last few lines of the poem makes their effect even stronger.

SPEAKER

While we're calling the speaker "she" and the addressee "he" in this guide, the poem itself doesn't give readers even that much information about its characters. The reader can know only this much of the speaker: this is a person who's both passionate and realistic. While she longs to be remembered by the beloved person she's speaking to, she also understands human frailty, and knows that although memory isn't perfect, people can have a deep influence on each other even after they're forgotten.

There's a curious strength in this speaker's willingness to admit that, as much as she longs to be remembered, she might not get exactly what she wants. The speaker also comes across as profoundly loving: she's selfless enough to feel that it's better for her beloved to be happy than sad. But she doesn't pretend to be so selfless that she wants her lover to be happy and forgetful right away or all the time. Her truthfulness is part of her complex and honest understanding of love and grief.

SETTING

There's no concrete setting in this poem, but the speaker indirectly evokes the different worlds of the living and the dead. She calls death "the silent land," emphasizing the way that death prevents *communication*; only through memory and thought (or, indeed, through art like this very poem, which may record both memory and thought) can the dead speak to the living. The world of the living is physical; the "silent land" is isolated, intangible, and mysterious.

The land of the dead is also a place of "darkness and corruption": there doesn't seem to be much thought of a happy afterlife here. The "silent land," whatever it is, doesn't seem to be a place from which the speaker will look down on her beloved twanging a harp. Memory is so important to this speaker because the "silent land" will keep her and her beloved completely apart.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Christina Rossetti (1830-1894) was an important Victorian poet, and she spent her life at the heart of her contemporary cultural world. The daughter of an artistic Italian family (her brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti was also a well-known poet and painter), Rossetti was born in England, and grew up surrounded by poetry and art. She began her own career young; she wrote "Remember" when she was only 19.

Rossetti, unlike many poets, was popular and well-known in her lifetime. Her long poem "Goblin Market" started a Victorian vogue for rather sinister fairy tales. She was also a noted early feminist figure, and many of her poems deal with the complexities of women's lives in a restrictive society. Frequent illnesses meant Rossetti turned much of her energy inward, and her rich-but-tormented emotional life colors much of her work.

Rossetti was influenced by Elizabeth Barrett Browning—another popular female poet with strong ties to Italy—and some of her contemporaries saw her as the older poet's natural successor. She was also connected to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the artistic school of which her brother Dante Gabriel was a founding member. Her father's work as a scholar of Italian literature meant she was exposed at an early age to the great Italian poets Dante and Petrarch, whose influence may be seen in her fondness for the Italian sonnet form.

Rossetti's reputation as a brilliant lyrical poet has never tarnished, and she's still much-studied today. Her poetry has been a major influence on writers from Virginia Woolf to Philip Larkin.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Christina Rossetti lived in a world marked both by revolutionary change and reactionary conservatism. The Victorians were innovators and empire-builders, and England reshaped itself considerably under the reign of Victoria, its first truly powerful queen since Elizabeth I. A primarily rural population made an unprecedented shift to the cities as factory work outpaced farm work, and writers from Dickens to Hardy worried about the human effects of this kind of change.

Perhaps in response to this speedy reconfiguration of the world, Victorian social culture became deeply conservative. Women were expected to adhere to a strict code of sexual morals: a woman must be chaste, pliant, and submissive, and any deviation could mean social exile. But within this repressive landscape, women writers began to flourish, asserting the complexity and meaningfulness of their own lives. 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

- More on Rossetti's Life and Work — A short biography and links to more of Rossetti's poems from the Poetry Foundation. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/christina-rossetti)
- A Reading of the Poem — Listen to the actor Mairin O'Hagan perform the poem aloud. (https://youtu.be/SpmK4p5bY20)
- Gender and Power in Rossetti's Work — An article on Christina Rossetti's influence as a feminist thinker. (https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/christina-rossetti-gender-and-power)
- Portraits of Rossetti — A selection of portraits of Rossetti from London's National Portrait Gallery. Some depict her with her artistic family, and some are by a member of her artistic family—namely her brother, the painter and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti. (https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp03876/christina-georgina-rossetti)
- The Poem's Manuscript — See pictures of the poem in Rossetti's own handwriting. (https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/20923/lot/407/)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER CHRISTINA ROSSETTI POEMS

- Cousin Kate
- In an Artist's Studio
- Maude Clare
- No, Thank You, John

HOW TO CITE

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