**Christina Rossetti "A Birthday"**

**My heart is like a singing bird**

**Whose nest is in a water'd shoot;**

**My heart is like an apple-tree**

**Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit;**

**My heart is like a rainbow shell**

**That paddles in a halcyon sea;**

**My heart is gladder than all these**

**Because my love is come to me.**

**Raise me a dais of silk and down;**

**Hang it with vair and purple dyes;**

**Carve it in doves and pomegranates,**

**And peacocks with a hundred eyes;**

**Work it in gold and silver grapes,**

**In leaves and silver fleurs-de-lys;**

**Because the birthday of my life**

**Is come, my love is come to me.**

**Summary:**

The narrator of "A Birthday" expresses her delight about her love's upcoming birthday. The narrator, who most likely voices Rossetti's own views, compares her heart to various things in nature. She uses the images of a songbird, a fruit-laden apple-tree, and a rainbow to express the depth of her love. She asks for an elaborate golden throne carved in wood. She joyfully exclaims that the birthday of her love and her life has arrived.

**Analysis:**

Rossetti divides this sixteen-line poem into two eight-line stanzas, each with an irregular rhyme pattern.

The narrator expresses the fullness of her heart upon the occasion of her love's birthday by starting every comparison in the first stanza with "My heart is like". Rossetti's use of anaphora, evident in the repetition of this line, emphasizes the narrator's inability to articulate her joy through language. She continues to search for an appropriate simile for her feelings, using symbols that invoke images of celebration and happiness. The laden apple-tree promises the nourishment of fruit. The rainbow signifies God's promise to Noah and mankind that he will not flood the earth again.

Through these similes, the narrator attempts to express her joy about the arrival of her love. This "love" could be a man, but this is unlikely. It is probable that her "love" is somehow connected to her Christian faith. The love could represent Easter and the arrival of Spring, which signals rebirth and rejuvenation. The images in this poem could certainly pertain to the arrival of spring.

Rossetti frequently refers to the Second Coming of Christ as the ultimate "birthday" in her work. The Second Coming is central to the Christian faith, because it symbolizes the new kingdom replacing the old Earth. In her description of the purple throne, Rossetti draws upon the imagery of the Temple of Jerusalem from the Old Testament, which represents God's presence on Earth.

It is clear that regardless of whom the "love" represents, the narrator feels extreme joy at his or her arrival. A singing bird uses melody to express itself similar to the way that humans use words. Similarly, the narrator reveals the longing of her heart with the freedom of a bird. She personifies the other objects, imbuing them with human capabilities and emotions. This connection between nature and the divine is common amongst Pre-Raphaelite poets and artists.

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**Imagery and symbolism**

The imagery used in the first stanza draws on familiar natural objects but can also be read at another level in the light of Rossetti's knowledge of the [Bible](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Bible). In the second verse, the focus is on artificial objects hung, carved and worked by human hands. Various images in this verse demonstrate an awareness of traditional [Christian](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Christian) art, as well as reflecting and celebrating human creativity.

**A singing bird** - To a ‘singing bird' (line 1), vocal expression is as natural as breathing. By speaking of her ‘heart' in these terms, the speaker indicates that her song forms a natural part of herself and is an overflow of her identity. The image of the singing bird is one which is often used in Romantic poetry. William Wordsworth emphasised the importance of expressing natural feelings when he argued that it was his intention to create a poetry which was a ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'.

**A watered shoot** - By having a ‘nest' in a ‘watered shoot' (line 2), the speaker suggests that the sustenance upon which she can live and rest has been provided:

* The word shoot alludes to the first stages of growth of a plant as it emerges from the ground. By describing a shoot as ‘well watered', the poem conveys ideas of lushness and fertility. However, rather than making a nest in a full grown tree, by making it in a shoot, the singing bird remains in a place of fragility, since it is easy to uproot or destroy a shoot
* The idea of being watered has biblical [connotation](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/connotation)s. In the [Old Testament](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Old-Testament) book of [Isaiah](http://crossref-it.info/repository/bible-books/Isaiah), the believers in [Jerusalem](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Jerusalem) are encouraged by [God](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/God)'s promise that he will guide them and provide for their needs:

**An apple tree** - The image of the ‘apple tree / Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit' (lines 3-4) would be a familiar sight in an age more in touch with its agricultural roots than today

* It recalls the imagery in Keats' *Ode to Autumn*. This begins by describing fruit ripe and ready on apple trees:
* Mention of apples might also lead Rossetti's readers to think of the accounts of the first humans in the [Garden of Eden](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Garden-of-Eden) before the [Fall](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Fall) where they lived in perfect peace with nature and one another. It is also likely that Rossetti is alluding to the biblical concept of the [Tree of Life](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Tree-of-Life). The writer of the [Old Testament](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Old-Testament) book [Proverbs](http://crossref-it.info/repository/bible-books/Proverbs), declares that those who ‘lay hold' of this tree ‘will be blessed' ([Proverbs 3:18](http://crossref-it.info/textguide/christina-rossetti-selected-poems/28/1809#bible_verse)).

**Rainbow … halcyon** - By speaking of her heart as a ‘rainbow shell / That paddles in a halcyon sea' (lines 5-6), the speaker provides an image of exuberant colour drifting at ease in tranquil waters.

* According to the Bible, the image of the rainbow refers to the fulfilment of God's promises, when God helped [Noah](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Noah) to escape the [flood](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/flood) which wiped out the known world. He then set a rainbow in the sky as a promise that never again would such an event occur ([Genesis 19:3](http://crossref-it.info/textguide/christina-rossetti-selected-poems/28/1809#bible_verse))
	+ It is possible that the speaker perceives that God's promises are being fulfilled in her life and wants to celebrate this
* The term ‘halcyon' comes from the Greek myth of a bird (possibly a kingfisher) which was said to breed about the time of the winter solstice in a nest floating on the sea. According to ancient writers, it charmed the wind and waves so that the sea was especially calm during the period.
	+ For English readers, the phrase ‘halcyon days' was associated with ideas of joy, prosperity and tranquillity
	+ The poem's speaker uses the image of the halcyon sea to indicate the deep comfort and rest she has found.

By ending the first verse with the declaration that her ‘heart is gladder than all these' (line 7), the speaker indicates that descriptions of the natural world are incapable of fully expressing her exuberant emotional state.

**Pathetic fallacy** - The speaker of *A Birthday*uses the technique of [pathetic fallacy](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/pathetic-fallacy) when she gives emotions to the ‘apple tree' full of fruit and the ‘rainbow shell'. This is the treatment of inanimate objects, such as trees and houses, as if they had human feelings, thought or sensations. The term was invented by critic John Ruskin in 1856 when he wrote that the aim of the pathetic fallacy was ‘to signify any description of inanimate natural objects that ascribes to them human capabilities, sensations and emotions'.

**The Temple** - Rossetti draws on the imagery used in the Old Testament to discuss the [Temple](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Temple%22%20%5Co%20%22Temple)which symbolised God's presence with his people. For the [Jews](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Jews) in the Old Testament, the Temple was the place where they met with God. *A Birthday* mentions purple hangings, carved fruit and statues of animals, which all figure in the descriptions of [Solomon](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Solomon)'s Temple given in [1 Kings 6:14](http://crossref-it.info/textguide/christina-rossetti-selected-poems/28/1809#bible_verse), [1 Kings 6:18](http://crossref-it.info/textguide/christina-rossetti-selected-poems/28/1809#bible_verse), [1 Kings 6:29](http://crossref-it.info/textguide/christina-rossetti-selected-poems/28/1809#bible_verse) and [2 Chronicles 3:14](http://crossref-it.info/textguide/christina-rossetti-selected-poems/28/1809#bible_verse) and [2 Chronicles 3:16](http://crossref-it.info/textguide/christina-rossetti-selected-poems/28/1809#bible_verse).

**A Dais** - The word ‘dais' (line 9) indicates a raised platform. The speaker seems to envisage a structure built in celebration of the return of her love. The ‘silk and down' from which it is made are materials of softness and luxury, as well as conveying lightness, which adds to the sense of uplifting that the poem conveys.

**Royalty and nobility** - The imagery of ‘vair', ‘purple', ‘gold', ‘silver' and ‘fleur-de-lys' (line 10) is imagery traditionally associated with royalty and nobility

* ‘vair' is an expensive fur obtained from a variety of squirrel with a grey back and white belly. It was often used in the 13th and 14th centuries as a trimming or lining for garments and is associated with heraldry
* The dye used to create purple tones was so expensive it was only available to the rich and therefore, became a colour associated with royalty
* Precious metals are associated with crowns and other regalia
* The fleur–de-lys is a heraldic symbol derived from the lily. It was often engraved on the armour of royalty.

**Birds** - Following the description of the singing bird in the first verse, the second alludes to representation of doves and peacocks on the dais.

* [Dove](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Dove)s are used in the Bible to represent:
	+ Reconciliation and peace. This arises from the story of Noah, when a dove sent out from the [Ark](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Ark) returns with an olive leaf in its beak, signifying that the storm / [flood](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/flood%22%20%5Co%20%22flood)was over ([Genesis 8:11](http://crossref-it.info/textguide/christina-rossetti-selected-poems/28/1809#bible_verse))
	+ The [Holy Spirit](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Holy-Spirit), as at the [baptism](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/baptism) of [Jesus](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Jesus) ([Matthew 3:16](http://crossref-it.info/textguide/christina-rossetti-selected-poems/28/1809#bible_verse))
* The description of ‘peacocks with a hundred eyes' (line 12) corresponds to a traditional and mythical understanding of the bird as a symbol of all-seeing [God](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/God).

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**Themes**

**Self-expression and the natural world**

*A Birthday* is concerned with natural and spontaneous expression through song or poetry, beginning with the image of the ‘singing bird' (l.1). Poetry provides a natural outlet for the speaker's emotions.

**Memory and forgetfulness**

Memory is a sustaining force in this poem. In *A Birthday*, the speaker's joy in the arrival in her love is bound up in the memory of what he means or has meant to her. This hints at the notion that identity is founded upon memory and that self-awareness is constructed by the remembrance of a former self.

**Earthly life and ‘life after life'**

The images of new life in the natural world in *A Birthday* can be seen to allude to new life after death.

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**Christina Rossetti "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.**

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**Summary:**

The narrator, who presumably represents Rossetti, addresses her beloved and encourages him to remember her after her death. She asks him to remember her even when his memory of her begins to fade. Eventually, the narrator gives this person (it is unclear if he or she is real or imagined) her permission to forget her gradually because it is better to "forget and smile" than to "remember and be sad."

**Analysis:**

“Remember” is a Petrarchan sonnet in iambic pentameter, consisting of an ABBA ABBA octave and a CDE CDE sestet.

Rossetti repeats the word “remember” throughout the entire poem, as if the narrator fears that her beloved will not heed her request. Rossetti also uses repetition to underline the vast boundary between life and death, writing “gone away,” and later, “gone far away.” The “silent land” is a symbol of death, emphasizing the narrator's loneliness without her beloved rather, which is stronger than her fear of death itself. Acceptance of death is common in Pre-Raphaelite philosophy. Pre-Raphaelites believed that material troubles pale in comparison to the struggles of the mind.

The tone of the octave is contemplative and reconciliatory on the topic of death. The narrator can finally be at peace because she has renounced her desire for earthly pleasures, such as the physical presence of her beloved. She is even accepting of death, content to exist only in her beloved's memory. However, she has not yet made peace with the possibility that her lover will forget her; this form of death would be more painful than her physical expiration.

Even though the narrator seems to reach peace with her death at the end of the octave, the Pre-Raphaelite belief system demands a further renunciation of human desire. The narrator’s tone changes with the volta, which is the break between the octave and the sestet. The volta typically accompanies a change in attitude, which is true in this poem. The narrator even renounces the need to be remembered, which is ironic because the poem is titled “Remember.” She wishes for her beloved to be happy, even if that means forgetting her. The narrator sacrifices her personal desire in an expression of true love.

"Remember" ultimately deals with the struggle between physical existence and the afterlife. Rossetti grapples with the idea of a physical body, which is subject to decay and death, and how it relates to an eternal soul.

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**Language and tone**

**Repetition**

The term ‘remember' runs, like a [refrain](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/refrain), throughout the [sonnet](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/sonnet). However, its power seems to decrease through the poem, rather as if the voice and memory of the speaker is fading from life:

* The first two [imperative verb](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/imperative-verb)s are placed at the start rather than the end of the first and fifth lines
* In the middle of the seventh, the strength of the request is modified by the word ‘Only' on its third appearance
* It is further qualified in adverbial sub-clauses by ‘And afterwards' and ‘Better .. you / Than .. you' in the sestet, losing its association with ‘me'.

Further repetition with variation is seen in:

* ‘gone away / Gone far away', which reinforces the distance that is growing between the speaker and her lover and emphasises the boundary that exists between life and death
* ‘if you should forget / Better … you should forget', which turns the possibility of forgetfulness into an imperative.

**Tone**

The voice of the speaker is controlled but increasingly tentative, revealing as well as concealing meaning. The certainties of being able to remain with the beloved (l.4), of audible advice and prayer (l.8) are replaced by vestiges of memory amidst increasing forgetfulness. The speaker even changes the message s/he wants to give to the beloved. The command to remember is replaced by the suggestion s/he is happy for the beloved to forget.

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**Structure and versification**

**Turning**

The act of turning forms a key structural pattern in *Remember*. In the first line, the speaker asks the beloved to remember the speaker once s/he has ‘gone away'. It is not until the mention of the ‘silent land' in the second line that it appears this is a [euphemism](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/euphemism) for death. S/he recalls how, in previous meetings, there was reluctance to turn away from the beloved, yet this is now a necessity that they both must deal with. Alternatively, the idea of ‘staying' can be seen as a reference to remaining in the memory of the beloved.

**The volta**

In line 9, the [volta](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/volta%22%20%5Co%20%22volta) (or turning point of the [Petrarchan](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Petrarchan) [sonnet](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/sonnet)), the speaker's tone changes. Turning from the instruction to remember, s/he suddenly chooses to accept that s/he may be forgotten and declares that it would be far better that the beloved forgot and was happy than remembered and was sad. At the same time, the assumed happy past of the lovers is perhaps shaken by the idea that the thoughts the speaker ‘once ... had' should be forgotten because they were not entirely positive.

**Metre**

The traditional metre of a [sonnet](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/sonnet) is [iambic](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/iambic) [pentameter](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/pentameter). Used here, the regularity of the iambic beat reinforces the sense of control the speaker attempts to establish over the matter of death and the beloved's reaction to this, something s/he suggests s/he has little control over. The inversion of the first foot in l. 2, 7 and 13 hints at the passion which is fighting for expression. However, the strict pentameter lines convey the enclosure and restraint of the speaker as s/he suggests that s/he has more to express but cannot find the appropriate words in which to do so.

The iamb is a rising [foot](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/foot) and its consistent use emphasises the progressive movement of the speaker's thoughts as s/he comes to a realisation that s/he may be forgotten. Throughout*Remember*, Rossetti combines the repetition of words with the effect of the metre to highlight several important movements. For instance, whereas the pronoun ‘I' is stressed twice in the octave (lines 1, 3), it remains unstressed in the sestet and the word ‘had' is stressed in its place, highlighting the passing of a particular identity (line 12).

**Rhyme**

The [rhyme](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/rhyme) scheme of the [octave](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/octave) consists of two enclosed [quatrains](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/quatrains): abba, abba. The enclosure of the rhyme scheme reflects the retention of a person's ‘thoughts' that the speaker describes as existing in the memory of the beloved.

The rhyme scheme of the [sestet](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/sestet) runs cddece. By beginning with a cdd rhyme and then breaking into a different pattern, it emphases the shift of the speaker's thoughts. The disruption of the expected pattern may also hint at the intrusion of uncomfortable ‘thoughts' of the speaker (proceeding from a ‘dark' place), the memory of which would sadden the beloved.

By joining ‘had' and ‘sad' (lines 12, 14), Rossetti structurally highlights the disjunction between remembering and forgetting.

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**Imagery and symbolism**

**The hand** - The speaker anticipates a time when her lover will no longer be able to ‘hold' her ‘by the hand' (line 3). The image of holding hands is one which is employed throughout the poetry of Rossetti's brother, Dante Gabriel, and is often used to indicate the first manifestations of love between a man and woman. By using the image of hand-holding in *Remember*, Rossetti suggests a kind of possession. By indicating that her lover will no longer be able to hold her by the hand the speaker suggests that he will no longer have any part in her or be able to possess her in the same way as he was perhaps used to.

**Darkness and corruption** - The speaker foresees a time when, once the ‘darkness and corruption' that are associated with grief and death leave the beloved, only a ‘vestige' or trace of the speaker's presence will remain. S/he does not specify what constitutes this ‘darkness and corruption' but it may refer to the speaker's physical state after death – ‘corruption' was a term often used in the [Bible](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Bible) to refer to the physical decay of death as well as moral decline (see [Acts 13:36-37](http://crossref-it.info/textguide/christina-rossetti-selected-poems/28/1853#bible_verse), [Isaiah 38:17](http://crossref-it.info/textguide/christina-rossetti-selected-poems/28/1853#bible_verse)), whilst ‘darkness' was associated with [hell](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/hell) ([Matthew 8:12](http://crossref-it.info/textguide/christina-rossetti-selected-poems/28/1853#bible_verse)). In that sense, there is a cloud cast over the ‘vestige of ... thoughts'.

The word ‘vestige' indicates something (often material) which remains after the destruction or disappearance of the main portion of something. By applying the word to the memory of the speaker's thoughts in the mind of the beloved, the word is given a more abstract meaning. Thoughts and feelings will remain even after the speaker's presence is in ‘darkness' or no longer visible.

**The ‘silent land' (l. 2)** - The speaker anticipates entering the ‘silent land' which s/he perceives to be ‘far away' from life on earth. As well as indicating physical distance, the phrase ‘far away' is also suggestive of quite obvious differences. It is hinted that the land to which the speaker looks forward to going, is very different from the land the beloved is used to inhabiting.

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**Themes**

**The role of women**

*Remember*can be read as highlighting the passive role expected of women in Victorian society. If the speaker is female, we see her as the recipient of the dominant male's actions, who:

* Holds on to / possesses her
* Talks at her (‘You tell me')
* Lays down what the future is to hold for her (‘our future that you plann'd')
* Advises her (‘counsel') and prays for her (assuming spiritual oversight).

In the light of this, perhaps the speaker's inner thoughts come from a ‘dark' place and are rebellious and resentful of this treatment. They may well trouble the beloved, who can only smile if he ignores them.

**Grief**

Considering the high mortality rate in Victorian Britain, it is fair to suppose that, like Rossetti herself, most of her early readers would have had some experience of death, whether of a parent, sibling, friend or lover. Although her [devotional](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/devotional) writings express a firm hope in the promises of [heaven](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/heaven) and [eternal life](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/eternal-life) that the [Bible](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Bible) offers, many of Rossetti's non-devotional poems attempt to reconcile this hope with the emotion of grief that is natural when a person loses someone close to them through death.

**Prayer**

The speaker suggests that, when she is dead, it will be too late to pray for her (line 8). Whilst [Roman Catholic](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Roman-Catholic) tradition teaches that [prayer](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/prayer)s should be offered for people that have died, offering prayers for the dead is not encouraged in the [Anglican Church](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Anglican-Church).

By claiming that it will be too late to pray for her once she has ‘gone away', the speaker emphasises the urgency of prayers offered in the present day.

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**Christina Rossettis "Up-hill"**

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?

   Yes, to the very end.

Will the day’s journey take the whole long day?

   From morn to night, my friend.

But is there for the night a resting-place?

   A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.

May not the darkness hide it from my face?

   You cannot miss that inn.

Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?

   Those who have gone before.

Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?

   They will not keep you standing at that door.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?

   Of labour you shall find the sum.

Will there be beds for me and all who seek?

   Yea, beds for all who come.

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**Summary:**

Over the course of a journey, the narrator asks her guide eight questions about the road ahead. The narrator asks if the roads are all up-hill and if the journey will take all day. The guide replies in the affirmative. Next, the narrator asks if there is a place to rest for the night and if the darkness will obscure said resting-place from their view. The guide assures the narrator that there is an inn and they will not be able to miss it. The narrator's fifth question is about which other travelers will be on the road. At the inn, the narrator asks if the other travelers would prefer for her to knock or call out. The guide tells the narrator that someone will open the door. Lastly, the narrator asks if there will be a bed for her. The guide tells her that there are beds for everyone.

**Analysis:**

The question and answer form is common in devotional writing, because it encourages the reader to contemplate his or her own response to the question. The guide addresses the narrator as “my friend," which is also what Christ called his disciples. The poem is comprised of four stanzas with four lines each, following the ABAB rhyme scheme. In this way, the rhyme scheme separates the traveler from the guide, and the simplicity alleviates the pressure of the difficult topic. The meter starts with a trochee and shifts into alternating iambic pentameter and trimeter. The pace is consistent, just like the narrator's steady up-hill climb.

The journey is the prominent symbol in this poem, and is open to a few different interpretations. The first interpretation is that the poem symbolizes the journey from birth to death. The darkening sky foreshadows the end of life, and the inn represents the final resting place. Considering Rossetti’s religious background, this final resting place could be interpreted as Heaven. The act of knocking on the door represents the Christian confession of sin and the need for forgiveness before admittance into Heaven. When describing this moment, Rossetti chooses to use a nearly verbatim quote from the Gospel of Matthew. Rossetti frames death as a form of respite after the tiring journey of life.

There is a slight possible variation on the interpretation that the road represents the journey of life. Already careworn, the weary traveler wonders if life grows easier as she grows older. However, the guide tells her that the road that remains is up-hill and arduous. This interpretation does not resolve the symbolism behind the inn. It is possible that the inn could represent death, which also provides an opportunity for rest at the end of the road.

A third reading seems less likely because of Rossetti’s religious views, but it is worth examining. This school of thought considers the journey to represent Christian purgatory. In this case, the inn would also represent Heaven, just like in the first interpretation. “Up-hill” is a classic example of Rossetti’s devotional literature, which dealt with doubt as well as eternal assurance. The road takes on several meanings, each revealing a facet of Rossetti's contemplation of life and its hardships.

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**Imagery and symbolism**

**The road** - In *Up-hill*, the road symbolises the journey the speaker takes. Instead of being straight, the fact that it is ‘winding' and ‘up-hill' suggests that the path is long and difficult. However, that there is actually a road leading up the hill indicates that plenty of others have already taken the route that is being contemplated. The speaker will not have to carve or find her own path since it has already been revealed to her.

The road can be interpreted:

* Literally, as a long walk to an unseen destination
* [Metaphorically](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Metaphorically), as representing the path that life takes
* [Symbolically](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Symbolically), as the way to live spoken of in the [Bible](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Bible). See Aspects of Literature > Big ideas from the Bible > [Path, way](http://crossref-it.info/articles/42/Path%2C-way) and [Journey of faith, Exodus, pilgrims and sojourners](http://crossref-it.info/articles/28/Journey-of-faith%2C-Exodus%2C-pilgrims-and-sojourners).

**The inn** - The traveller is told that she ‘cannot miss that inn' (line 8) that stands at the top of the hill and offers rest for those who have spent the entire day climbing. Literally, the fact that it stands out in the darkness of the night indicates that the light that it sheds is powerful and will not be overpowered. Metaphorically the ‘inn' represents security.

**The door** - The traveller asks whether s/he will have to ‘knock' the door of the inn when s/he reaches it or whether s/he will be kept waiting for admittance. S/he is reassured that the door will be opened upon arrival and that ‘those who have gone before' will be ready to greet him/her (lines 10-12).

**Beds** - The traveller is promised ‘beds for all who come' (line 16) to the inn. The image of beds indicates rest, comfort, shelter and security. After a long struggle, the idea of resting is all that the speaker can look forward to.

The idea of beds also points to Rossetti's engagement with a [doctrine](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/doctrine) spoken of as ‘[soul](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/soul) sleep'. This doctrine teaches that when [Christian](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Christian)s die, instead of going to straight to [heaven](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/heaven), they experience a period of rest and sleep in preparation for the [Second Coming](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Second-Coming) of Jesus, at which point they will be taken up to heaven and be rewarded with [eternal life](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/eternal-life). This doctrine is also apparent in Rossetti's poem *Song(When I am dead)*

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**Themes**

**Moving upwards**

Throughout her poetry, Rossetti draws on the imagery of flames, mountains, stairs and hills to emphasise the upward progression of the spiritual journey. She suggests that the journey to heaven is one of continuous upward movement in that the soul is moved upwards away from the earth and its pleasures as it learns more of God and of heaven.

In *Up-hill*, Rossetti emphasises the idea that the upward progression of the soul is not a simple and easy process. Lots of distractions, concerns and doubts can weigh a person down and the upward movement can turn into one of struggle instead of one of joy.

**Doubt**

The speaker's questions all arise from a sense of uncertainty and doubt. S/he is unsure what the journey holds and what will be found at the end of it. The incessant questioning is short and simple and the answers received often serve to create more questions. It is not a poem which expands on certain doctrines or ideas.

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**Christina Rossetti "Song"**

When I am dead, my dearest,

         Sing no sad songs for me;

Plant thou no roses at my head,

         Nor shady cypress tree:

Be the green grass above me

         With showers and dewdrops wet;

And if thou wilt, remember,

         And if thou wilt, forget.

I shall not see the shadows,

         I shall not feel the rain;

I shall not hear the nightingale

         Sing on, as if in pain:

And dreaming through the twilight

         That doth not rise nor set,

Haply I may remember,

         And haply may forget.

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**Summary and Analysis**

The first stanza of the poem describes the world of the living people. The poet addresses her dearest one and asks him not to sing sad songs for her when she is dead. She does not want others to plant roses or shady cypress tree at her tomb. She likes her tomb with green grass associated with showers and dewdrops.

Normally, we find that after death people express their grief by singing sad songs and by planting roses and cypress tree. But the poet thinks that they are just showing off. She does not like showy behavior. She rather thinks that if people are really sorry for the death of their loving person they should be humble like grass and only few drops of tears will be sufficient. As the showers and dewdrops make the grass green forever, so the tears will make their love eternal. Afterwards she does not force him to remember. If he likes he will remember and if he does not like he will forget.

After her death she will be buried in the grave, and she will go into the world of the dead. She will not see the shadows of the cypress planted by her dearest one. She will not feel the rain or tears. However, sadly one may sing, but she will not hear it. The sweet and sad song of the nightingale will not touch her. She will pass the rest of her time dreaming through the never-ending evening when the sun neither rises nor sets. Perhaps she will remember it. Perhaps she will forget it.

The entire poem consists of two stanzas and of two varying significance. The first stanza deals with the world of living and the second with the poet's experience in the grave. The poet may be trying to be realistic regarding her death. She is against any sort of mourning that sings like of showing off. When she is dead, she won’t be able to hear any songs, see any roses, or feel the Cypress shade. Therefore, the best way to mourn someone’s death is by expressing the love as immortal as the green grass through the drops of tears as pure as the dew drops. It is also equally meaningless to insist someone to remember him/her after his/her death. Therefore, she gives her dearest one the freedom to remember of forgetting as he/she wishes. The poem also suggests us that no one can escape from the torturous grip of the death. If reflects a quite melancholic and inflicted heart of the speaker.

By questioning the mourning ritual a poet had criticized the showing of behavior and suggested some more sincere ways to express one’s sadness. Similarly, she also seems to be giving more importance to life than after death rituals. Many people neglect their loved one when they are alive, but try to show their grief by spending a lot of time and money, when they are dead. The poet seems to be against such attitude and conduct. Rather people should be humble in expressing their love and their sadness for the departed ones.

The poem is published under the title ‘song’ elsewhere. It can be sung to the accompaniment of some musical instrument. It has expressed the feelings and thoughts of the poet in a very personal and subjective way. The rhymes, me and a tree, and rain and pain please us. Similarly, the rhymes wet and forget, and set and forget having the harsh sound ‘t’ which reminds us the harsh reality in life. The repetition of ‘s’, ‘w’ and ‘sh’ sound makes this song perfect. The music of the stanzas of this poem rises like a gesture of the hand.

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**Imagery and symbolism**

**Natural imagery** - The speaker requests that the lover plant ‘no roses' on his/her grave and no ‘shady cypress tree' in his/her memory (lines 3-4)

* Whilst roses represent love, the cypress tree traditionally symbolises mourning because cypress branches were carried at funerals.
* By declaring that s/he has no need of these things, the speaker reassures the lover that s/he will not be jealous or resentful if the lover continues living his/her life rather than to mourn for the speaker.

**Silence** - In the second verse, the speaker claims that once dead s/he will no longer:

         ‘hear the nightingale
Sing on, as if in pain' (l.11-12)

* The nightingale was a common symbol in Romantic poetry (see Literary Context >[Romantic Poetry](http://crossref-it.info/textguide/The-poetry-of-Christina-Rossetti/28/1795)). Keats used it in *Ode to a Nightingale* to speak of joy, music, self-expression, nature and immortality
* By suggesting that the nightingale's song is associated with pain, Rossetti denies the idea that the natural world is a place of pure joy.

**Twilight** - The speaker looks forward to:

         ‘dreaming through the twilight
That doth not rise or set' (line 15)

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**Themes**

**Self-expression and the natural world**

This poem is concerned with natural and spontaneous expression through song or poetry, such as the song of the ‘nightingale' (l.11). Poetry provides a natural outlet for the speaker's emotions.

**Memory and forgetfulness**

Memory is a sustaining force. In *Song* forgetfulness is the axis upon which the poem is rooted. This hints at the notion that identity is founded upon memory and that self-awareness is constructed by the remembrance of a former self.

**Earthly life and ‘life after life'**

The images of natural growth in *Song* can be seen to replace the grief that the speaker anticipates her lover will experience after she has died.

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