

*Remember* by Christina Rossetti

Remember me when I am gone away,  
Gone far away into the silent land;  
When you can no more hold me by the hand,  
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.

Remember me when no more day by day  
You tell me of our future that you planned:  
Only remember me; you understand  
It will be late to counsel then or pray.

Yet if you should forget me for a while  
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:  
For if the darkness and corruption leave  
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,  
Better by far you should forget and smile  
Than that you should remember and be sad.

Christina Rossetti's sonnet, "Remember", begins with a simple request: for the listener to think of the speaker once she (the speaker) has passed away. As the speaker continues to verbalize her desire to be remembered, she wonders if it would be better for the listener to forget her instead, rather than he "should remember and be sad." The speaker is torn because, while she wants to be remembered, she also understands the importance of moving on from the loss of a loved one and does not want her memory to be a burden.

With its fairly strict iambic pentameter and rhyme scheme, "Remember" is a sonnet. Like most sonnets, one of the major themes in this poem is love, as seen in the relationship between the speaker and her lover, the listener. The speaker (the "I" of the poem) speaks directly to the listener (referred to as "you") in the imperative voice, creating an instant relationship between these two characters. She directly asserts that, once she is gone, she and the listener will no longer hold hands, indicating that the characters indeed share a romantic relationship. In fact, she demonstrates that this relationship is much more complex than simply two people in love by saying, "day by day/ You tell me of our future that you planned." These

characters are in a serious relationship and are at the level where they speak openly about living together and even marriage.

The first two stanzas adhere to the rules of sonnet structure, following the typical ABBAABBA rhyme scheme and imitating the romantic ideas of a classic Italian sonnet. During these first two stanzas, the speaker describes holding hands, daily visits, and creating a future life together—all romantic images. These images create emotion in the poem by appealing to the reader's traditional definition of a romance. However, this poem ends with a CDDECE instead of a CDECDE rhyme pattern, which suggests that, like the sonnet itself, the relationship is not perfect. This imperfection in the rhyme scheme draws attention back to the not-so-idealized images in the first two stanzas: when describing what will no longer happen when she is dead, the speaker says, "Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay." In this line, it seems as though there have been moments where the speaker has wanted to leave the listener and end the relationship, yet she never can. This fluctuating relationship is not the ordinary sort of love described in a standard sonnet.

Also, the different interpretations of the line "Only remember me" further demonstrate the atypical nature of this relationship. In the traditional sonnet style, this phrase reads, "Only *remember* me," suggesting that the speaker simply wants to be remembered by her loved one. However, this phrase has a completely different meaning when read outside of the iambic pentameter. If interpreted, "*Only* remember *me*," the phrase means that the speaker wants the listener to remember her as a person and to overlook the negative aspects of their relationship. With the emphasis on "me," the line connotes that there were problems in the relationship that she wants the listener to forget when she dies.

Unlike traditional sonnets that are quick paced, “Remember” is slow moving. The lines in the first two stanzas all naturally follow the same, steady and slow rhythm and each line is either punctuated at the end or has a naturally occurring caesura at the line break. The pace is further slowed by the punctuation marks within the lines, which give the poem a halting feel, much like a funeral procession. This slow pace creates a solemn tone, adding to the concept of death and loss portrayed by images such as “the silent land.”

The third stanza has a different feel than the rest of the poem. Unlike the first two stanzas, it does not start with “Remember me,” but rather, with “Yet”—a clear indication of a volta in the poem. “Yet” signifies that the speaker is about to say something different than, even contradictory to, her earlier musings. Also, this third stanza varies from the first two in that it does not conform to the sonnet rhyme scheme, further suggesting that the subject matter will contrast the earlier ideas. Finally, instead of following the steady, slow and halting pace created in the earlier part of the poem, the final stanza changes speed. The speaker deviates from the original tempo when she says, “For if the darkness and corruption leave/ A vestige of the thoughts that once I had.” The enjambment of these two lines quickens the speed of the poem because there is no stop until the end of the sentence. There is neither punctuation nor pause anywhere within these two lines that could check the speed. There have been previous moments of enjambment in the poem, but those lines have contained natural pauses to serve as punctuation. Conversely, lines 11 and 12 do not slow down, despite the break, so the poem accelerates. However, the poem grinds to a halt when the speaker says, “Better by far you should forget and smile/ Than that you should remember and be sad.”

This change of speed, in addition to the variations in rhyme and introductory phrase, highlights the last two lines that contain the theme of the poem. The speaker comes to the final

conclusion that she does not want her memory to cause him more sorrow. He should not feel guilty for forgetting her if remembering her causes him more pain. However, like the earlier dual interpretations of the line “Only remember me,” this final couplet leaves the audience with a question that remains unanswered: would the listener be sad because he simply grieves his lost love, or is he mournful because he remembers how the relationship was failing?