

## Christina Rossetti

After you have read the poems, answer the following questions:



### 'An Apple-Gathering'

1. Why does Rossetti choose a first person female narrative viewpoint?
2. The opening two lines describe female decorative beauty. What do they suggest about womankind?
3. What links can you make between the first stanza and the language and events of 'Goblin Market'?
4. In lines 5-8, the narrator's deviation from social norms seems to be 'mocked'. Why is this?
5. Why does Rossetti choose 'Lilian and Lilies' as, effectively, role models for the speaker?
6. Why do you think Rossetti adds the detail 'Their mother's home was near'? How does this link with the speaker's behaviour, and assumed social role (as a female)?
7. Why is Rossetti's first allusion to a man so elliptical ('A stronger hand than hers')?
8. In lines 17-24, the speaker seems to lament her lost beloved. Why does Rossetti place this stanza in this position?
9. What do you think the passing 'neighbours' represent?
10. Why does night fall at the end of the poem, and why does the speaker 'loiter[...] still'? What is she waiting for?

### 'Maude Clare'

1. Why does Rossetti choose an apparent third person omniscient narrative viewpoint?
2. What effect does the alternating rhyme scheme have?
3. Why might Rossetti use pronouns first (such as 'she' in line 1) before introducing names?
4. Why does Rossetti describe a repeated cycle in lines 9-12, comparing Thomas and Nell with his parents?
5. In line 13, there is a shift to the actual viewpoint: first person. Why do you think Rossetti does this at this particular point?
6. Why is the speaker anonymous?
7. What is Thomas's source of 'inward strife'?
8. Why are the main characters described as 'pale'?
9. Maude Clare's 'gift' to Thomas appears to be a 'bless[ing]' - why is it said to be for 'the hearth ... the board ... [and] the marriage bed'?
10. However, Maude Clare's gift is a poisoned (golden) chalice: half a golden chain. In lines 21-28, consider the connotations of 'You wore about your neck', 'we waded ankle-deep / For lilies' and 'With feet amongst the lily leaves, - / The lilies are budding now'. How do these connotations link with the gift of the golden chain?

11. Thomas 'strove to match' Maude Clare 'scorn with scorn'. Read lines 29-32. Is he successful? Why?
12. Maude Clare's gift to Nell is tainted. Consider the quotations 'were it fruit, the blooms were gone', 'were it flowers, the dew', 'my share of a fickle heart', 'Mine of a paltry love'. What effects do they have?
13. Why does Rossetti make Nell begin her reply to Maude Clare's gift with the conjunction 'And'?
14. Why does Nell compliment Maude Clare in the final stanza?
15. Why do you think the nameless narrator remains speechless and makes no further comments on events at the end of the poem - especially as she described Thomas as '[her] lord'?

### 'Echo'

1. What or who might the title refer to?
2. Research the myth of Echo and Narcissus. What are the parallels and differences?
3. Why does Rossetti repeat the imperative verb 'Come' to an unnamed addressee?
4. The rhyme scheme is ABABCC / DEDEFF / GHGHII. How does this link with the poem's title?
5. What is the difference between 'silence' (line 2) and 'speaking silence' (line 3)?
6. Why does the speaker use the triple image of 'memory, hope, love' in line 6?
7. Why are there internal echoes (using the word 'sweet') in line 7?
8. The first overt religious reference is to 'Paradise' in line 8. Why might this be?
9. In line 9, love is presented as a unifying force. Why might this be?
10. Arguably, the pace slows in lines 11-12, particularly with the use of adjective 'slow' and the use of commas. Why might this be?
11. The final stanza suggests that dreams are the boundary between life and death, fantasy and reality. How does Rossetti suggest this? Why?

### 'A Birthday'

1. Why did Rossetti call this poem 'A Birthday'? Is this literal or metaphorical?
2. The poem is predominantly in iambic pentameter (a heartbeat-like rhythm). Why is this?
3. The poem contains a series of similes for the speaker's heart. Highlight them all and consider the connotations and context of each.
4. Line 8 suggests that all these similes are subsumed by the 'love' coming to the speaker. How does this link to the title?
5. The second stanza contains a series of imperative to the unknown addressees. Highlight them all and consider the connotations and context of each.
6. In the second stanza, why is both opulent and natural imagery combined?
7. Why do you think the verb 'come' is repeated like a refrain in the final line of each stanza?

### 'Up-Hill'

1. Consider the title of the poem: 'Up-Hill'. The journey of the poem goes 'up-hill all the way'. What might the journey be a metaphor for?
2. The rhyme scheme is ABAB / CDCD / EFEF / GHGH. Discuss the effects of this structural choice.
3. The structure is also question/answer throughout. Discuss the effect of this structural choice.
4. One of the implications is that the questioner is inexperienced, and the traveller is wise. If so, who might they be?
5. Highlight all the references to time. Consider the context and effect of each.
6. Lines 8, 12 and 16 contain mysterious references to the 'inn'. What do you think the inn, its door and the beds represents?
7. Consider Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem in the Christian Bible. What relevance does this have to the poem and your previous answers?

### 'At Home'

1. Consider the title of the poem: 'At Home'. What does it suggest about the (apparently female) speaker, and the place of women?
2. The opening clause 'When I was dead' is remarkable. What would you say about it?
3. If the speaker is dead, and thinking about your answer to question 1, what is the significance of her spirit haunting the house?
4. Consider the fruit images in the final 5 lines of the first stanza. Can you make detailed comparisons between these and the use of fruit symbolism in 'Goblin Market'?
5. Why do you think the 'friends' are looking to the future in stanza 2?
6. What is the significance of 'full noon' in the third stanza? What does this time of day symbolise? What could it represent in terms of the speaker and the friends?
7. Why does the speaker say she was 'of yesterday'?
8. The speaker could be described as being as in a liminal state in the final stanza. Find evidence for this, and analyse each piece of evidence in light of this opinion.
9. The rhyme scheme is an interesting combination of repetition (such as ABCBDEFE) and circularity (the 'ay' rhyme recurring from line 18 onwards). Why might Rossetti have structured her verse in this way?
10. One might argue that the four stanzas' themes run: sight (1), sound (2), memory (3), feeling (4). Find evidence from each stanza for this argument. To what extent do you agree with it? What could the significance be?

**'A Christmas Carol'**

1. The first stanza sets the scene with layers of coldness and rigidity. Why do you think Rossetti opens the poem in this way?
2. The poem is set at the time of the Christian nativity. This is traditionally celebrated on December 25<sup>th</sup>, but, in actuality, on a date unknown - Christmas may have been conflated with a pagan, polytheistic midwinter festival as Christianity spread across the country around the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. Why is it simply called 'A Christmas Carol'?
3. The second stanza introduces the power of God, and argues that He found a way to humanity - but that his way was humble ('A stable-place sufficed'). Why does Rossetti do this?
4. Why might there be an internal rhyme ('Him' / 'cherubim') in line 17? Why are these concepts linked in this way?
5. Why might partial quantities ('A breastful of milk / And a mangerful of hay') be enough for God/Jesus?
6. Why do the 'angels' worship Jesus/God?
7. Why are the 'ox and ass and camel' presented as worshipping Jesus/God?
8. In the penultimate stanza, all kinds of angels surround Jesus in worship, but Mary, Jesus's mother, is the only one allowed to worship him 'With a kiss'. Why might Rossetti have presented the virgin Mary ('maiden') in this way? Does it link in any way with the Victorian stereotype of the ideal woman (Coventry Patmore's 'The Angel in the House')?
9. This stanza leads to the speaker's commitment to God in the final stanza. Why do you think Rossetti presents a personal story emerging from the narrative of Christ's birth?
10. Why does the speaker post questions in the final stanza?
11. Why does the speaker choose to give God her 'heart'? What might this represent?