

Investigate! The poetry of Christina

Rossetti: A Birthday

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Investigating A Birthday

- ❖ What are your associations with the idea of a 'birthday'?
 - Do you see these associations shared by the speaker in that poem?
- ❖ Rossetti refers to the act of singing and musical expression
 - How does this affect the mood the poem creates?
 - Write down references to the act of singing
 - Of what is the creation of music shown to be an expression?
- ❖ What comes to mind when you think about spring?
 - Do you see these associations shared by the speaker of the poem?
- ❖ List the phrases which indicate that the speaker depends on another for happiness
 - To what extent do you think people are defined by the relationships they are in (somebody's child, somebody's sibling, somebody's pupil/employee etc)?
 - Do you think an individual can understand him/herself in isolation from such relationships?
 - What evidence of this can you find in the poem?

Investigating language and tone

- ❖ Think about the voice that emerges
 - Does this voice bring out any particular emotions?
 - How far are you able to identify with the poetic speaker?
- ❖ What evidence is there to suggest that either of the poem's speaker is actually a woman?
 - Would a difference in gender mean that you read the poems any differently?
 - Do you consider that the speaker displays traits traditionally ascribed to a male or female voice?

Investigating structure and versification

- ❖ Read the first verse again closely, thinking about its rhythm
 - Which other words does the poem emphasise through the rhythm that the metre creates?
 - Which words are linked to one another through the metre?

- ❖ Like *Song (when I am dead, my dearest)*, the poem is written in a 16 line form, divided up into 2 stanzas
 - Can you identify any further similarities in form?
 - Can you identify any differences?
 - How does the metre in each differ?
- ❖ What does the structure contribute to the poem?
 - Does it affect the tone in which the poems are read?

Investigating imagery and symbolism

- ❖ List the imagery the speaker uses throughout the poem
 - Why do you think that s/he moves from describing the natural world to objects that have been man-made?
- ❖ What ambiguous aspects are there in the imagery described?
- ❖ Do you think that the symbolism that is drawn upon adequately reflects the speaker's joy?
 - What images would you use to reflect a state of joy you were feeling?
 - Do these images correspond to any in the poem?

Investigating themes

- ❖ List all the allusions to the natural world that the poem makes
 - How do these allusions correspond to the speaker's emotional state?
 - What do they reveal about the purpose of the poem?
 - What do they reveal about the identity of the speaker?