

Investigate! The poetry of Christina

Rossetti: *Despised and Rejected*

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Investigating *Despised and Rejected*

- ❖ What do you think makes *Despised and Rejected* a devotional poem?
 - Why do you think Rossetti chose to use it as the *first* devotional poem of *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems*?
- ❖ Do you think it is a good choice?
- ❖ What are your associations with the words 'despised' and 'rejected'?
- ❖ Is there anything in the poem you find surprising?
 - How do these elements challenge your expectation?
- ❖ Can you find any other clues pointing to the idea that the stranger knocking at the door is Jesus?
 - Why do you think that Rossetti does not name him directly?
 - If the stranger is not to be interpreted as Jesus, who do you think that he is?
- ❖ Why do you think that the speaker calls his friends 'hollow'?
 - What evidence is there for this?
 - What do you think they could have been troubling the speaker with?
- ❖ Read Matthew 25:34-42
 - How relevant do you think understanding Jesus' words is to an understanding of the poem?

- Are there other echoes of this passage in the poem?

Investigating language and tone

- ❖ Whom do you think that the speaker is addressing at the start of the poem?
 - At which points does the addressee change?
- ❖ Why do you think that the tone of the dialogue is so urgent?
- ❖ What indications of surprise does the speaker express at the arrival of his/her visitor?
 - Which elements of the dialogue, if any, do you find surprising?

Investigating structure and versification

- ❖ Re-read the poem aloud
 - List any surprising variations to the rhyme and rhythm that you notice
 - How do these variations correspond to the changes in the tone of the speaker?

Investigating imagery and symbolism

- ❖ To what extent do you think the house can be understood as a symbol of an individual?

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- What are the difficulties with reading the image of the house in this way?
- What are the advantages?
- ❖ What is the effect of the imagery and symbolism the speaker uses?
 - Think especially about the symbolism of blood
- ❖ How powerful is the symbol of the footprints 'marked in blood' (l. 57) which the speaker notices on his grass the morning after the stranger's visit?
 - How do you think that seeing these footprints made him feel?
 - Guilty?
 - Shocked?
 - Scared?

Investigating themes

- ❖ What comments do you think *Despised and Rejected* makes about society or human selfishness?
 - Do you think that these comments are relevant to twenty-first century readers?
- ❖ Why do you think that the speaker did not answer his/her door?
- ❖ What attitude does s/he express towards the judgement that the stranger warns about?
 - Why do you think that this is?