

I. Context & Key Ideas (AO3)

- **Victorian Era:** Rapid industrialisation, rigid class systems, strong patriarchal norms, and significant social/religious debates.
- **Devout Anglican:** Rossetti's deep Christian faith permeates her poetry, focusing on salvation, death, sin, sacrifice, and the afterlife.
- **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood:** Associated with her brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti; valued realism, intense colours, nature, and medieval themes.
- **Fallen Women:** Rossetti worked at St. Mary Magdalene Penitentiary, a home for "fallen" women (prostitutes or those who had pre-marital sex), a theme reflected in poems like *Goblin Market* and *Maude Clare*.
- **Gender Roles:** Explores the limited agency and societal expectations placed upon Victorian women, sometimes challenging or resisting them (*No, Thank You, John*).

II. The Poems, Themes, & Structure

Poem Title	Core Themes	Key Structural/Stylistic Notes (AO2)
Song: When I am dead, my dearest	Death, remembrance, indifference, acceptance.	Simple, lyrical, musical quality (intended to be sung); ambiguous tone regarding remembrance; anaphora ("And if the...").
Remember	Memory, love, death, letting go.	Petrarchan sonnet (14 lines, octave + sestet); volta (turn) at line 9; shifts from plea to selfless acceptance.
From the Antique	Female oppression, hopelessness, yearning for non-existence.	Repetitive structure ("It's a weary life..."); cyclical feeling of despair; simple language masking profound feminist/nihilistic message.
Echo	Unattainable love, memory, the afterlife, nostalgia.	Trochaic metre (uncommon, creates haunting rhythm); repetition; exploration of longing for a lost lover's "voice" or presence.

Shut Out	Exclusion (from Eden/Heaven/happiness), loss, regret.	Allegorical (the garden represents joy or purity); simple ABAB rhyme; lyrical, sorrowful tone.
In the Round Tower at Jhansi	War, duty, suicide pact, colonialism (Indian Mutiny context).	Narrative ballad; powerful sense of tragedy and devotion; historical, but a fictionalised account.
A Birthday	Spiritual awakening, joy, love (divine or human), celebration.	Vibrant imagery ("my heart is like a singing bird"); contrasts simple life with rich, celebratory tone; exultant, spiritual joy.
Soeur Louise de la Miséricorde	Vanity, regret, loss of passion/desire, religious devotion.	Dramatic monologue; the persona (a real historical figure) laments her wasted life and faded desire ("vanity of vanities"); themes of asceticism vs passion.
Maude Clare	Female agency, social critique, betrayal, reputation.	Narrative ballad; power dynamic between the "fallen" Maude and the weak Lord Thomas and Nelly; focus on social standing and past mistakes.
Up-Hill	Faith, spiritual journey, death, the afterlife.	Dialogue format (question/answer); simple, cyclical structure; allegorical journey (life's struggles leading to heaven's "inn").
No, Thank You, John	Female autonomy, rejection of patriarchal expectations, defiance.	Dialogue/monologue; assertive, direct tone ("I never loved you, John"); explores female right to refuse romantic attention and control their own life.
Good Friday	Religious doubt, guilt, faith, divine love.	Reflective, confessional tone; uses nature (stone) as a metaphor for spiritual coldness; longing for faith.
Goblin Market	Sisterhood, sacrifice, temptation, sin, redemption, sexuality.	Narrative fairy tale/allegory; complex meter and rhyme scheme; rich, sensual imagery; interpretations vary from Christian allegory to feminist manifesto.

Twice	Love (human vs divine), judgement, self-worth, rejection.	The speaker asks for God's judgement after human rejection; themes of submission and spiritual acceptance.
Winter: My Secret	Playfulness, female mystery, autonomy, flirtation.	Evasive, conversational tone; uses the withholding of information as a form of power or self-protection.

III. Connecting Poems (AO4)

- **Death & Grief:** *Song, Remember, From the Antique.*
- **Female Autonomy & Agency:** *No, Thank You, John, Maude Clare, Winter: My Secret, Goblin Market* (sisters saving each other).
- **Religious Faith & Doubt:** *Up-Hill, Good Friday, Twice, Soeur Louise.*
- **Loss of Innocence/Temptation:** *Goblin Market, Shut Out, Soeur Louise.*
- **Unattainable Love:** *Echo, Maude Clare.*

IV. Critical Viewpoints (AO5)

- **Feminist Critics (e.g., Elaine Showalter):** See Rossetti challenging patriarchal confinement, even within the bounds of Victorian expectations.
- **Pamela Bickley:** Argues Rossetti's work "resists easy categorisation", highlighting the complexity and ambiguity of her message.
- **M. Kirby (on *Goblin Market*):** Interprets it as an "exploration of sexual temptation" and "fear of female sexuality and its potential consequences".

Feminist/Gender & Power

- **Simon Avery:** Views Rossetti's poems as "uncompromising in their analysis of women's place in society", with speakers aware of "social and political expectations which define acceptable roles for women and which potentially leave them powerless". He sees *No, Thank You, John* and *Maude Clare* as critiques of dominant masculinity, where female characters assert independence or male characters appear weak.

- **Lynda Palazzo:** Argues Rossetti rewrites the Fall of Eve in terms of the abuse of women she observed.
- **Kathleen Blake:** Suggests Rossetti believed "women's rights and Christianity were at odds" and that she portrays "the woman in love [as] the emblem of radical insufficiency and dependence upon external dispensation".
- **Virginia Woolf:** Described Rossetti as a figure of intensity.

Religious & Spiritual Interpretations

- **Simon Avery (on religion):** States that "all her work... has a resonating religious or spiritual drive", though her religion is not simple, showing her "constantly interrogating religious ideas and beliefs, often with a degree of tension and anxiety".
- **Anthony Harrison:** Believes Rossetti's main focus was her "desire for Christ, the ideal lover" and that her "obsession with death results from her impassioned anticipation of the afterlife".
- **C.M. Bowra:** Suggested Rossetti felt "the claims of love were not for her" and that "love released a melancholy desire for death".

Biographical & Historical Context

- **Jan Marsh:** Emphasizes Rossetti’s connection to emotional pain and the complexity of her personality.
- **Emma Mason:** Proposes Rossetti looks towards a "quickening" rather than destruction, seeing natural elements as a "sustained flow of baptismal grace".

Formal & Stylistic

- **Barbara Morden:** Describes *Remember* as using "apophasis" to create ambiguity, suggesting Rossetti protects herself against charges of ungodly and unfeminine discontent.
- **Liam McNamara:** Considers Rossetti a "proto-feminist," anticipating later enlightened views of women.
- **Anthony Harrison:** Notes that her poetry focuses on "renunciation" rather than fulfilling earthly love or betrayal.