

### **How does Rossetti treat the themes of love and time in these poems?**

It is evident that themes of love and time are frequently referred to in several of Rossetti's poems and I believe that she treats these themes in a variety of ways. Regarding love, Rossetti explores the disappointment and betrayal caused by love, her love of God as though part of an intimate relationship and the temptation that love causes young women to abandon the traditional rules. Using seasonal imagery, Rossetti relates to time contradicting herself as she often implies that we should take time to enjoy and observe life whilst she also states that she is unable to be satisfied with earthly life and it is death that will provide the ultimate fulfilment.

Aware of the inevitable that seasons will always change and can never be controlled, Rossetti uses the motif of life cycles in order to demonstrate that we should be satisfied with all that God provided us with on earth. "Life nursed in its grave by death", In 'Spring' Rossetti implies a significant image that death is the protector of life and nurtures new growing life. Supporting this in 'Bitter for sweet', Rossetti stimulates us not to rush through life but observe more and slow down, "Its sun and perfumes and sweet flowers". Demonstrating that rapid changes in life take place and as humans we never notice these Rossetti chose to present this poem in only 8 lines, however in this she progresses through 4 months. This conveys that cycles are to be anticipated and using a passage of time through seasons she is able to symbolise the journey through life, "And even autumn closes".

Looking back at her life in regret in 'Another Spring' she confesses "If I might see another Spring/ I'd listen to the daylight birds", Rossetti portrays the message that if she could slow down time she would appreciate her life more and that time is precious, "I would not want for anything". A parallel to this in 'Song', Rossetti treats time as missed opportunities, "But pluck an ivy branch for me" demonstrating that she missed out on her youth and prime time but grew old before she had the chance to enjoy life. Using flower imagery, Rossetti compares the different states of life, "Violets are for the grave of youth", a vibrant and exciting time and for someone to die young would be a shame. "And laurel for the perfect prime", a symbol of continuity and everlasting life; however "withered leaves I chose", Rossetti conveys a humble attitude as though she doesn't deserve anymore.

Contrasting her positive thoughts of living life to the full, Rossetti also releases her inner emotions regarding her own experience of not being successful in love and consequently was unable to enjoy life like others do. Through 'song', "Who look upon them hand in hand", Rossetti realises how nicer the world could be if she was able to share it with someone special. "Two doves upon the self same branch", using the recurring motif of 'innocence and purity', Rossetti attempts to see life as others do who take time to observe the beauty that surrounds them, and wishes that she could be as content, "Oh happy they who look on them". Aware that she looks at herself and her life in bleak terms Rossetti affirms, "Who look upon them hand

in hand/ and never give a thought to night" as she constantly refers to the satisfaction of death and after life.

Projecting her bleakness of her earthly experience, in 'The one certainty', Rossetti reflects her belief that on earth nothing ever changes, "today is still the same as yesterday", and believes that life on earth is insignificant as she never has anything to look forward to, "And morning shall be cold and twilight grey". Complimenting this idea, in 'The convent threshold', Rossetti states "heaven-bells rejoicing rang and rang" portraying the idea of her calling to God to enable her to reach heaven. Perceiving death as a celebration, "Prefer to glean with Ruth", Rossetti realistically sees life as a potential death, "All colours turn to green" and believes that the sooner you die the more time you have to spend with God, "And youth and beauty die/So be it, O my God, Thou God of truth". Directly correlating to this theme of death as an ultimate path to life, in 'Wife to husband' Rossetti shortens her fourth line to "Good-bye", signifying the fact that she is always being thwarted and stumbles to the very end, "I must die" as though she feels that she does no more to satisfy herself on earth and is ready to find completion which she believes she will find with God. In 'A sigh or a smile', Rossetti at first shows signs of optimism as she creates a turning point, "Somewhere or other may be far or near", changing from "near or far" demonstrating a progression as though she is closer to what she is looking for, however this can also be interpreted as though she has grown to accept that she won't find fulfilment until death. This seems to be the correct assumption as in 'Grown and Flown' as the title suggests she is extremely pessimistic, "leaves are withering/How should one love at all?", using seasonal trends to express the fact that she has given up hope of finding happiness and only God can secure this.

Almost creating an intimate relationship with God, Rossetti addresses God/Jesus as though he were her partner, for example in 'Weary in well-doing', "That I may let my toil/and rest with thee?" Often however Rossetti uses her dichotomy to appear humble in 'The lowest place', "Give me the lowest place....make one more low" however at the same time she is also appearing quite arrogant as she dictates to God how he should be treating her, "Where I may sit and see/ My God and love Thee so". This also further implies that Rossetti almost sees herself as an equal to God, as though a partner of God as she suggests that she is able to nourish him, "O Jesus, drink of me". Incorporating images of plenty, we can perceive this statement in several ways as there is the possibility that Rossetti is being arrogant, she may be giving something back to God, or this may be a plea to be accepted by being absorbed by God.

Evidently Rossetti also uses the motif of 'fertility' in order to relate to both her relationship with God and her dissatisfaction with time on earth in 'A better resurrection'. "O Jesus, quicken me", also a point in pregnancy demonstrating the ability to give life, this phrase can also mean to hasten life or death as Rossetti sees God as someone who is able to complete her and longs for her after life to come. Further expressing Rossetti's feelings of 'speciality and singularity' in 'Weary in well-doing', "But Christ my God, when will it be...And rest with thee?" by questioning God this can imply that she is challenging God or quite the opposite, that she is looking for support in God as she is confused. Contrasting her harmonious relationship with God however in the beginning of this poem, the structured rhyme scheme 'ABAB'

also demonstrates a two part struggle between herself and God. "I would have gone....God bade me rest", however as God has the final word "God bids me work", this reflects that he is winning the battle as the conclusive force.

Finally Rossetti also relates to the power that 'temptation' and 'lust' can have on young women and through 'Goblin Market' and 'Cousin Kate' she is able to convey her warning. "One had a cats face/ One whisked a tail", using animal imagery Rossetti reflects the Goblin men to be sinister and threatening as a parallel to how she viewed men due to her past experiences of having several unsuccessful relationships. Contrasting the men she portrays the two young women to be pure and innocent using more elegant animal imagery, "Like a rush-imbedded swan". Through 'Goblin Market' Rossetti is able to demonstrate that by not giving into temptation you are able to claim your rewards later on in life as you will then be able to find true love. "Afterwards, when both were wives/ with children of their own..." A parallel to 'Goblin Market' is 'Cousin Kate' as the 1<sup>st</sup> person explains the suffering caused to those who give into temptation and the advantages of being able to resist. "You had the stronger wing", this demonstrates by using a bird image of rising up into the sky, that if you are able to marry successfully you will be lifted up in society. However, "he bound you with his ring", although the lord marries Kate because she didn't give in, Rossetti states that it wasn't true love but a formality as though Kate was bought as a part of a contract. "O cousin Kate, my love was true/ Your love was writ in sand", this emphasizes the fact that Kate's love was temporary due to a convenient deal where as the 'first person' actually loved the lord but now has to suffer as she was unable to resist temptation and is no longer respected, "So now I moan, an unclean thing".

I believe that the reason why Rossetti treats the theme of love with negativity and warnings against men in general being "Cross-grained; uncivil" (goblin market) is due to her past experiences with men as she has never been able to find true love and only sees God as the perfect partner for her. Elizabeth Jennings states, "They seem only to have tempted her to an even greater melancholy of temper than she was usually accustomed to". This I believe relates to how she perceives 'time' as she evidently acknowledges that life goes by quickly and time is precious, however she is aware that because she has no-one to share this with, she is unable to satisfy her time completely. I believe that Rossetti uses her faith in God as her escape from her bleakness of her life on earth as this gives her something to look forward to as she believes that death will enable her a truly satisfying life. To conclude, I believe that Rossetti treats the theme of time by creating a parallel to the inevitability of seasons emphasizing that with all good comes bad and that however hard you try to control life, it never stands still and you will never be able to turn back in time. Presenting her warnings about love and her doubts that she will ever find happiness, Rossetti treats the theme of love as a challenge as she states that if you are able to find love on earth, you are lucky and therefore able to enjoy your time on earth. However if like Rossetti you are unable to find your perfect partner, you may resolve into finding your faith in God as inevitably no one will ever match up to him and he is responsible for our happiness whether we find it on earth or by death.

Katie Jackson  
12MH