

'Echo'

Summary and context:

The title reflects the idea of a sound memory. The speaker remembers a former lover: someone who has left her or passed away. The tone of the poem is very passionate and sensual and may reflect Rossetti's belief in an eternal sleep.

Come to me in the silence of the night;
Come in the speaking silence of a dream;
Come with soft rounded cheeks and eyes as bright
As sunlight on a stream;
Come back in tears,
O memory, hope, love of finished years.

O dream how sweet, too sweet, too bitter sweet,
Whose wakening should have been in Paradise,
Where souls brimfull of love abide and meet;
Where thirsting longing eyes
Watch the slow door
That opening, letting in, lets out no more.

Yet come to me in dreams, that I may live
My very life again though cold in death:
Come back to me in dreams, that I may give
Pulse for pulse, breath for breath:
Speak low, lean low,
As long ago, my love, how long ago.

Key features to note:

- The repetition of 'come' creates a tone of passion, desperation and sensuality immediately and throughout the poem.
- The similes linked to nature reflect the natural passion she feels.
- The reference to 'souls' shows the depth and passion of their love.
- Repeated references to memory reflect the pain of the loss of this lover.
- The references to 'pulse' and 'breath' demonstrate how all-consuming her love for this person has been.
- The first line of every stanza links back to the idea of the very first line with a focus on dreams, sleep, memories when alone.
- The regular stanza structure and rhyme scheme perhaps suggests the routine nature of her memory and desire.

Exam style question:

Discuss Rossetti's portrayal of memory in the poem 'Echo'.