Remember: Christina Rossetti

Remember me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land;
When you can no more hold me by the hand,
Nor I half turn to go, yet turning stay.

Remember me when no more day by day
You tell me of our future that you planned:
Only remember me; you understand

Jane Eyre: Charlotte Brontë

My tale draws to its close: one word respecting my experience of married life, and one brief glance at the fortunes of those whose names have most frequently recurred in this narrative, and I have done.

I have now been married ten years. I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth. I hold myself supremely blest – blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband’s life as fully is he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. I know no weariness of my Edward’s society: he knows none of mine, any more than we each do of the pulsation of the heart that beats in our separate bosoms; consequently, we are ever together. To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company. We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking. All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character – perfect concord is the result.

Mr Rochester continued blind the first two years of our union: perhaps it was that circumstance that drew us so very near – that knit us so very close: for I was then his vision, as I am still his right hand. Literally, I was (what he often called me) the apple of his eye. He saw nature – he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words, the effect of field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam – of the landscape before us; of the weather round us – and impressing by sound on his ear what light could no longer stamp on his eye. Never did I weary of reading to him; never did I weary of conducting him where he wished to go: of doing for him what he wished to be done. And there was a pleasure in my services, most full, most exquisite, even though sad – because he claimed these services without painful shame or dampening humiliation. He loved me so truly that he knew no reluctance in profiting by my attendance; he felt I loved him so fondly, that to yield that attendance was to indulge my sweetest wishes.

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I should learn everything then after a passage of quite dense character analysis, Eliot enlivens the narrative with Dorothea's own voice.

It would be my duty to study here Dorothea is envisaging her role as helpmeet of a man she hardly knows, enjoying the prospect of being able to perform her duty.

our lives she is already thinking of the two of them in the first person plural.

Pascal Blaise Pascal, a seventeenth-century French thinker, mathematician and physicist who made major contributions to scientific understanding. He abandoned science for religious philosophy after a mystical experience.

great men again, Dorothea is revealed as anxious not simply to do her duty but to be involved, at first through a man, as she seeks to marry one she views as great.

when I got older later, she hopes, she will be able to do great things herself, lead a grand life here – now – in England.

a mission to a people whose language I don’t know this rather poignant image highlights how difficult it is for Dorothea to satisfy herself that she has discharged her duties adequately.

A Woman of No Importance: Oscar Wilde (1893)

A Woman of No Importance was written when the campaign for women's suffrage and the right to education and work were key issues for Victorian society. The woman of the title is Rachel Arbuthnot who, having been jilted by her lover Lord Illingworth 20 years before the start of the play, is confronted with the possibility that her son, Gerald (who does not know who his real father is) will become Lord Illingworth's secretary. In this passage Mrs Arbuthnot tries to explain why she is so opposed to this idea, without revealing the whole truth to Gerald.

Gerald, come near… mother’s own boy this could be viewed as emotional blackmail, as Mrs Arbuthnot recalls her son’s childhood and asserts a sense of ownership in her relationship with him.

there was a girl once Mrs Arbuthnot is, in fact, speaking about her own history.

She knew nothing... everything this statement illustrates the vulnerability of young women in Victorian England, presenting them as defenceless, naive and innocent, the easy prey of privileged young men.

He made this girl love him Mrs Arbuthnot presents herself as the victim through the word made, suggesting that she had no choice.

she left her father’s house with him one morning this is an acknowledgment of a moral transgression – it was completely contrary to Victorian morality and society's attitudes to marriage.

he had promised to marry her this statement serves to illustrate her simplicity and vulnerability as a young woman.

Before her child was born this statement introduces the main issue of her story in an understated manner, which serves to maximize the effect of the revelation.

her life was ruined... ruined also the reiteration of the word ruined emphasizes the effect of giving birth to a child outside marriage in Victorian England. Wilde creates an image of a woman lost not just to society but to herself.

She suffered terribly – she suffers now the use of the past and present tenses reinforces the permanent nature of the effect on the woman’s life.

wears a mask... a leper these terms create an image of a woman who is forced to hide the truth from everyone to avoid being shunned as if she were diseased.

The fire... her anguish the use of fire and water as images of purification again serve to stress the terrible sense of guilt that haunts Mrs Arbuthnot.

Nothing... lost soul the repeated use of exclamation marks and the staccato sentences all serve to emphasize her abject misery.

That is why the repetition of this phrase clinches the argument and seems almost to echo the rhetoric of a court of law.