Soeur Louise de la Miséricorde by Christina Rossetti

The speaker

1. What situation is the speaker of the poem in? Find quotes to support this.

2. What is the tone of the poem? How is this made clear?

3. Comment on the significance of the following quotations:
   a. ‘I have desired, and I have been desired;’
   b. ‘Oh vanity of vanities, desire!’
   c. ‘Where is the hire for which my life was hired?’
   d. ‘Longing and love, a disenkindled fire’
   e. ‘love’s deathbed’
   f. ‘The dross of life, of love, of spent desire;’
   g. ‘Turning my garden plot to barren mire;’

4. What sort of experience does she suggest that love has been for her? In what ways is desire presented negatively?

5. Which of these statements do you find the most compelling? Find evidence to support your view.
   a. Rossetti presents desire as something that is hard to forget.
   b. Rossetti presents desire as a source of misery.
   c. Rossetti presents desire metaphorically.
   d. Rossetti’s use of structure presents desire as something fickle and fleeting.

Links with other poems

In a number of other poems Rossetti considers the theme of desire. Her thoughts are sometimes to do with her desire or shutting down her earthly desire to focus on her devotion to God.

Pick three other poems where the theme of desire is presented and consider how these poems link to ‘Soeur Louise de la Miséricorde.’

Possible essay question

Q1. Discuss Rossetti’s portrayal of desire in ‘Soeur Louise de la Miséricorde.’

In your answer explore the author’s use of language, imagery and verse form, and consider ways in which you find the poem characteristic of Rossetti’s work in your selection.