A Short Study of Christina Rossetti

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Yoshiko Muro (Ohara)

PREFACE

Christina G. Rossetti wrote about a thousand poems in her life. They are divided into the nursery songs, the general poems and the devotional poems. The two main features of her poems are her affluent imagination and her religious devotion.(1) In this paper, I am going to treat two subjects. The first subject is her wonderful imagination displayed in her lyrical poems. The second is her pious devotion sung in her devotional poems. I deal with her description about 'flowers' and 'water' in her lyrical nature poems, and 'death' in her poems of devotion. For 'flowers' and 'water' are necessary elements of her love of nature and her view of 'death' is a key-note of her devotion.

CHAPTER I

HER LOVE OF NATURE

'Imagination,' one of the qualities of her thought, is manifest in many of

(1) M. Zaturenska observes in her *Christina Rossetti*, P. 65 that She had a world of her own or rather two world, conflicting, different. One was a world of sensuous imagery and warm coloring, full of paradisical gardens and golden, never-falling fruit, in the arched shadows of which walked angels listening to an invisible choir . . . . . Then there was another world, a gray, silver-shimmering world seen through the rain and clouds . . . . . It was a world where the stern realist God of her belief dwelt.

her poems with her deep, familiar observation of nature. As William M. Rossetti, her elder brother, pointed, there is something vehement in her love of nature.

There are many descriptions of natural beauties, love of animals and flowers, —particularly the loveliness of the rose. Yet in spite of her deep love of nature, she could not make friend with nature to the fullest measure. Christina was born in London and brought up there. Only twice Christina left London and went to Frome and Holmer Green. There Christina made familiar with nature. Remembrance in Frome and Holmer Green gave comfort to her all through her life.

In her mind, every natural phenomenon was placed as a descriptive matter. Her sensibility perceived the sense of the Creation in creatures and was particularly in the creature called 'nature.'

If stars dropped out of heaven,
And if flowers took their place,
The sky would still look very fair,
And fair earth's face.

Winged angels might fly down to us
To pluck the stars,
But we could only long for flowers
Beyond the cloudy bars.(1)

When she looked at 'nature' her mind was childlike and innocent. And her attitude of mind to 'nature' was as flexible as water. Poetry found its passage as naturally as a stream flows. To Christina, 'nature' was a relief and escape. Because she felt that heavenly beauty and delight in 'nature.' In other words she could feel the rapture that an ordinary man could not feel.

> ". . . . in much of her prose description of natural phenomena, of flowers, of lovely objects, she has a gift that was rare, that is almost missing in the better poets of the Victorian age—the gift of precision, of accurate and careful observation.(2)

(1) "Sing-Song."
(2) M. Zaturenska: *Christina Rossetti*, P. 236.

She could describe the solemn Creator immanent in 'nature' with a deep familiality. When we think she was a keen observer of natural loveliness, it is no wonder for Christina to have perceived the true meaning of love of nature. Consequently she touched the core of religious devotion.

As she loved this world because she loved Paradise, so she loved 'nature' because it was God's creation. I shall remark on 'water' and 'flowers' among the descriptions of natural beauty.

1. 'Water'

Christina was especially attracted by water.

William M. Rossetti referred to her fondness of poetry, but he did not say about her liking of 'water' in particular. I think 'water' is an important element in her poetry. Water for her means anything that can be symbolized by water. When I read through her poetry, I found out many poems in which the 'water' is significant.

> "Of water, indeed, she was deeply, mystically fond. She constantly mentions it in her poems. She loved the places where water flowed, with tears she was friendly, pleased with showers and fountains, joyous with the sea. She learned much from the climate of England: it gave her heavenly dews, her mists and her sweet wholesome moisture." (1)

My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a watered shoot: (2)

This is a first line of 'Birthday.' She began to sing with a singing bird in her mind, and she sang that its bird grows on the shoot which is moistened by water. A small bird and verdure fresh boughs are expressed clearly.

Every valley drinks,
Every dell and hollow,
Where the kind rain sinks and sinks,
Green of Spring will follow. (3)

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(1) F. Shove: *Christina Rossetti*, P. 70.
(2) "A Birthday"
(3) "Winter Rain"

For Christina 'water' was a motive power in 'Winter Rain.' Valley and hill absorb water without reserve and by and by they sprout: they are conventional expressions but if we take a point of view that 'water' is a source of her life, its expression is understood in a different sense.

There are rivers lapsing down
Lily-laden to the sea: (4)

Immanence of life in this poem has to do with her christianity. Of the sea, that is nostalgia to every poet, also Christina sang. 'A Ballad of Boding' and 'An Old World Thickest' are prominent two poems about the 'sea.'

Each water drop made answer to the light,
Lit up a spark and showed the sun his face;
Soft purple shadows paved the grassy space
And crept from height to height,
From height to loftier height crept up apace.(5)

When she described about 'water,' she expressed vividly as if she had happened to be present in the scene. Concerning this problem, her poems have a very vivid emotion akin to mysticism. Moreover she caught beautiful objects in the 'water' that flows naturally or in sorrowful tears.

Its goal the river knows,
Dew drops find a way,
Sunlight cheers the rose
In her day: Shall I, lone sorrow past,
Find thee at the last?
Sorrow past.
Thee at last? (6)

There may be the day when the river ends, but the life of overflowing water will never end. Thus, after all, Christina filled her works with heavenly rapture, if she sang sadness in her verse.

(4) "By the Water"
(5) "An Old-World Thicket"
(6) "Confluents"

While we slumber and asleep
The sun leaps up from the deep——
Daylight born at the leap:——
Rapid, dominant, free
Athirst to bathe in the uttermost sea.
While we linger at play——

If the year would stand at May;——
Winds are up and away
Over land, over sea,
To their goal wherever their goal may be.

It is time to arise,
To race for the promised prize,——
The Sun flies, the Wind flies——
We are strong, we are free,
And home lies beyond the stars and the sea.(7)

I see a moral in this poem, but Christina did not forget to set her eyes up on Heaven which 'lies beyond the stars and the sea.'

'Sweet Life is dead'——'Not so.'
I meet him day by day
Where bluest fountains flow
And trees are white as snow
For it is time of May.(8)

Here fountains are used as a sweet symbol of hope. Where there is water, there is life——where there is water, there is rebirth. And her 'water' further signifies the purification of soul.

We know not a Voice of that River
If vocal or silent it be
Where for ever and ever and ever
It flows to no sea.

More deep than the seas is that River,
More full than their manifold tides,
Where for ever and ever and ever
It flows and abides.

For look on each bank of that River

(7) "A Song of Flight"
(8) "May"

The Tree of Life life-giving grows
Where for ever and ever and ever
The Pure River flows.(9)

If it did not have earthly shape, the place where there was 'water' was a delight to her. But Christina loved the 'water' that was flowing. Because the flowing water streams and reaches the eternal life, which gives us the fountain of life.

Weep yet awhile,—
Weep till that day shall dawn
When thou shalt smile:
Watch till the day
When all save only love shall pass away.

Weep, sick and lonely,
Bow thy heart to tears,
For none shall guess the secret
Of thy griefs and fears.
Weep, till the day dawn,
Refreshing dew:
For genial showers
Bring up the flowers,
And thou shalt sing,
In summertime of blossoming.(10)

It is no wonder that she, who loved 'water' that flows and never returns, was seeking for endless loneliness. Christina arrived at the goal by her faith. Even if sorrowful tears ran down her cheeks, Christina turned it into rapture. This hopeful atmosphere in her poems is a necessary result of her soul.

2. 'Flowers'

Once in a dream I saw the flowers
That bud and bloom in Paradise;
More fair they are than waking eyes
Have seen in all this world of ours.
And faint the perfume-bearing rose,

(9) "Whitsun Monday"
(10) "The Heart Knoweth"

And faint the lily on its stem,
And faint the perfect violet,
Compared with them.(1)

Flowers in Paradise are portrayed as superior things to roses, lilies and violets on earth, which she was very fond of.

In 'Mother and Child' she told about flowers in Paradise:

Oh I thought that there the flowers
never fade,
That there never sets the sun.(2)

The flowers are showed in plural form. She might have intended to express many kind of flowers. But these are of the same quality with those in Paradise. Because in 'A Shadow of Drothea'

I pluck young flowers of Paradise,
Lilies and roses red ; (3)

Here the flowers in Paradise are roses and lilies. In Christina's verse 'flowers' mean roses and lilies at the same time.

In other lines of the same poem:

Is there a path to heaven
My heavy foot may tread ?
And will you show that way to go,
That rose and lily bed ? (4)

In these lines, it is clear that roses and lilies are used in the general sense of 'flower.' She loved this world as a pattern of the Paradise. In short, because of her vehement yearning for Paradise she acknowledged this world. She embodied heaven in flowers which was a object of her love.

Her love of nature was a transformation of her longing for heaven. "Her mind's symbolic flowers" said F. Shove," was its passion-flower——its love

(1) "Paradse" 1 stz.
(2) "Mother and Child" 1 stz.
(3) "A Shadow of Dorothea"
(4) Ibid.

of God."[5] Christina might have thought the flowers in Paradise were much prettier than those in this world. It is proper that Christina, who often dreamed Paradise and fancied sweet pure flowers there, could write such a poem as 'A Trial' that has extremely beautiful colour-sensation.

The white dove cooeth in her downy nest,
Keeping her young ones warm beneath her breast:
The white moon saileth through the cool clear sky,
Screened by a tender mist in passing by:
The white rose buds, with thorns upon its stem,
All the more precious and more dear for them:
The stream shines silver in the tufted grass,
The white clouds scarcely dim it as they pass;
Deep in the valleys lily cups are white,
They send up incense all the holy night.
Our souls are white, made clear in Blood once shed:
White blessed Angels watch around our bed:——
O spotless Lamb of God, still keep us so,
Thou who wert born for us in time of snow.[6]

The love of God and the love of the beauty in God's creation are blended perfectly in this poem. White roses, angels and blood in this poem remind me of roses described by Dante in 'Divina Commedia.' Admitting that Christina's roses are overwhelmed by Dante's white roses, it is right that the roses are symbols of final beauty to both Christina and Dante.

Saints are like roses when they flush rarest,
Saintts are like lilies when they bloom fairest,
Saints are like violets sweetest of their kind:
Be it so.
Tomorrow blots out sorrow.[7]

Christina saw the saints' character in roses and violets; she did not limit saints' character to lilies exclusively. She did not use simile at random. It is clear when we read the short poem 'Consider the Lilies of the Field.'

(5) F. Shove: *Christina Rossetti*, p. 86.
(6) "Whitsun Eve"
(7) "I gave a sweets mell"

Solomon most glorious in array
Put not on his glories without care:——
Clothe us as Thy lilies of a day,
As the lilies Thou accountest fair.
Lilies of Thy making,
Of Thy love partaking,
Filling with free fragrance earth and air:
Thou Who gatherest lilies, gather us and wear.(8)

Colour and perfume of lilies are described in this poem. In 'Consider the lilies,' roses, daisies and violets are pictured and she wrote an instruction taught by wild flowers. In other poem 'Consider' Christina treated of lilies, but it is rather didactic. And 'Consider' is less impressive than 'Consider the lilies.'

Wreath no more lilies in my hair,
For I am dying, Sister sweet:
Or, if you will, for the last time
Indeed, why make me fair
Once for my winding-sheet.

Pluck no more roses for my breast,
For I like them fade in my prime:
Or, if you will, why pluck them still,
That they may share my rest
Once more for the last time.(9)

This poem was written in 1852. Two years before, she renounced J. Collinson's love.(10) This is an unhappy love-passage. 'Summer' is a parting season from roses. Roses are symbol of 'love.' Christina combined the end of her own love and the end of the flower of love. Lily gives us an image of holiness. Christina purified the ugly death by using lily flower. It is her tenderness to 'death,' I think.

Lilies and roses here serve as a set-off of 'death.' In this poem Christina endowed rose with the symbolism of 'love' and lily with that of purity. But

(8) "Consider the Lilies of the Field"
(9) "Summer is ended"
(10) John Collinson was the first man who proposed to Christina. Christina renounced because of his Catholicism.

occasionally she portrayed lily and rose as the general concept of 'flowers.'

> Thou sleepest where the lilies fade,
> Thou dwellest where the lilies fade not; (11)

In this 'Buried' she referred to the lilies and contrasted heavenly life with 'death.'

> Crocuses and snowdrops wither,
> Violets, primroses together,
> Fading with the fading Spring
> Before a fuller blossoming.
>
> O sweet Summer, pass not soon,
> Stay awhile the harvest-moon:
> O sweetest Summer, do not go,
> For Autumn's next and next the snow.
>
> Dreary Winter come at last:
> Come quickly, so be quickly past:
> Dusk and sluggish Winter, wane
> Till Spring and sunlight dawn again.(12)

In these lines, a note of pathos, always settled in her verse, penetrates to the bottom of this verse, through many phenomena in the four seasons of the flowers. But this poem differs from other poems in that here the light of hope faintly looms through the cloud of care and sorrow.

> A lily blossoming unseen
> Holds honey in its silver cup (13)
>
> Sweet as a fragrant rose amid the dew;——
> As sweet as fruitless too.(14)

These two poems and 'Seasons' were made in the same days. It appears to me that a lily and a rose symbolize Christina's attitude of mind.

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(11) "Buried"
(12) "Seasons"
(13) "To What Purpose Is This Waste?"
(14) "What?"

In the meadow——what in the meadow ?
Blue bells, butter cups, meadow sweet,
And fairy rings for the children's feet
In the meadow.

In the garden——what in the garden ?
Jacob's-ladder and Solomon's-seal,
And Love-lies-bleeding beside All heal
In the garden.(15)

I am a King,
Or an Emperor rather,
I wear crown-imperial
And prince's-feather :
Golden-rod is the sceptre
I wield and sway,
And a broad purple flag-flower
Waves for my flag.

Elder the pithy
With old-man and sage,
These are my councillors
Green in old age ;
Lords-and-ladies in silence
Stand round me and wait,
While gay ragged-robin
Makes bows at my gate.(16)

In this short poem, about ten flowers are mentioned. In spite of rare occasion of her contact with 'nature,' her love of 'nature' was delicate and keen. Her deep craving admiration of 'nature' is expressed as a crystalization of her love of nature.

O wind, where have you been,
That you blow so sweet ?
Among the violets
Which blossom at your feet.

The honey suckle waits
For Sumer and for heat ;
But violets in the chilly Spring

(15) "In the Meadow"
(16) "Sing-Song"

Make the turf so sweet.[17]

Christina delineated the violet clearly. Quiet violet is enlivened by her meditation. The violets bloom on a quiet path and have not intense perfume like roses or lilies. Christina was so fond of this flower that she sang of it manytimes. Judging from her modest character, the violets are suitable to represent Christina herself.[18]

As violets so be I recluse and sweet
Cheerful as daisies unaccounted rare,
Still sunward-gazing from a lowly seat,
Still sweetening wintry air.[19]

"As violets so be I recluse and sweet" expresses Christina's character itself.

Heartsease in my garden bed,
With sweet William white and red,
Honeysuckle on my wall:——
Heartsease blossoms in my heart
When sweet William comes to call;
But it withers when we part,
And the honey-trumpets fall.[20]

In this verse, pansy is used as a flower in love. Christina described many kind of flowers in various forms, but after all, the flowers she sang of oftenest are those which she liked best.

The lily has an air,
And the snowdrop a grace,
And the sweet-pea a way,
And the heartsease a face,——
Yet there's nothing like the rose
When she blows.[21]

(17) Ibid.
(18) F. Shove said in *Christina Rossetti*, p. 53. "The violets belong to Miss Rossetti"
(19) "As violets so be I"
(20) "Sing-Song"
(21) Ibid.

She was a lover of roses.

> There's sweetness in an apple tree,
> And profit in the corn
> But lady of all beauty
> Is a rose upon a thorn. (22)
> . . . . . .
> I have but one rose in the world,
> And my one rose stands a-drooping :
> Oh when my single rose is dead
> There'll be but thorns for stooping. (23)

She deals with roses symbolically here. Thus "her mind's symbolic flowers was its passion flower——its love of God."

CHAPTER II

HER DEVOTIONAL POEMS

> "It has been common for twentieth century critics of Christina Rossetti to wish that she had continued to live among the roses and lilies and violets and April raptures that make so many of her early poems delightful. They do not wish her devotional poems unwritten, they simply have not read them. But time brought change and suffering to her as it does to all too sensitive natures, and a religion of self-abnegation, of hard-won humility, subdued that early spontaneity and charm. One can now credit her with some of the finest devotional poems in the English language, poems of love transmuted into religious ecstasy, poems that have never been sufficiently admired in our country, for they were devotional and not metaphysical." (1)

Her devotional poems are a kind of manifestation of her own faith. Between her devotion to beauty and her devotion to its creator, in other words between her poems and her faith, no distance exists. It is needless to say that the source of her faith lay in the Bible. Therefore, she founded her verses on the Creator's holy words. (2) A peculiarity of her works is that

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(22) Ibid. (23) Ibid.

(1) M. Zaturenska : *Christina Rossetti*, p. 240.

(2) M. Zaturenska said in *C. R.* p. 182. "God was Father and Lover, the Rock Immovable, the Sheltering Arms to her"

they have medieval colour and flexible sensitiveness.(3) And there is nothing dark or miserable in her 'death' poem. The note of pathos is another peculiarity of her poems.(4) It is followed by 'death' and stairs which leads to heaven. I think her view of 'death' is noteworthy in her devotional poems. I shall remark on her poems about 'death' in chronological order. M. Zaturenska said "She had been primarily the poet of death, the poet of death-wish. How often she had sung of death, of Death crowned with roses, Death eternally young and beautiful crowned with myrtle, or lying nude and beautiful beneath the mournful cypress trees."(5)

"Twice" is written about death. In this poem 'death' is treated very simply, and I can not find even a glimpse of dreadful death. This poem was written in 1864 when she was thirty-four years old.

If we live, we must part:
If we die, we part in pain:
If we die, we shall part
Only to meet again.
By those tears on either cheek,
To-morrow you will speak.(6)

This poem was written in the same year. Christina had friendly feeling to 'death.' She did not fear 'death' in those days,——when she was young Christina expressed that 'death' meant 'only to meet again.'

Shall I forget in peace of Paradise?
I promise nothing: follow, friend, and see,
Faithful and wise.
(O my soul, lead the way he walks with me)(7)

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(3) Dante had influence upon her and Thomas-a-Kempis with "Imitatione Christi"
Christina wrote her verse that had taken its rise in "Imitatione Christi." Medieval atmosphere came to her.

(4) M. Zaturenska said in *C. R.* p. 242. "Unexpected surge of powerful pathos is seen over and over again in many of her devotional poems"

(5) M. Zaturenska: *C. R.*, p. 229.

(6) "Meeting" 3rd stz.

(7) "Shall I Forget" 2nd stz.

I feel here heavenly peace rules over 'death' and assuages its dreadfulness. 'Shall I Forget?' was written in 1865.

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
Yes, to the very end.
Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
From morn to night, my friend.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?
Of labour you shall find the sum.
Will there be beds for me and all who seek?
Yea beds for all who come. (8)

Christina sang the peace beyond the grave in this 'Up-Hill.' It was written six years before "Shall I Forget?" The motif of "Up-Hill" is the under-plot of "Shall I Forget?" Christina sought up-hill among the vain eathly sadness. Her conviction beyond death made her find up-hill way, and it was this latent conviction that presented death to her in a friendly image. At any rate, she told about 'death' unconcernedly in her earlier poems.

When I am dead, my dearest,
Sing no sad songs for me;
Plant thou no roses at my head,
Nor shady cypress tree:
Be the green grass above me
With showers and dew drops wet:
And if thou wilt, remember,
And if thou wilt, forget. (9)

Christina wrote this song when she was eighteen years old. She sang of 'death' in an objective way, where I appreciate a kind of lightness of 'death.' Death means an end of life, and we try to avoid it with all our might. But it was not detestable thing with Christina. Christina believed that 'death' is a key to open the door to heaven.

Love, strong as Death, is dead,

(8) "Up-Hill"
(9) "Song"

Come, let us make his bed
Among the dying flowers:
A green turf at his head,
And a stone at his feet,
Where on we may sit
In the quiet evening hours. (10)
. . . . . .
The curtains were half drawn, the floor was swept
And strewn with rushes, rosemary and may
Lay thick upon the bed on which I lay,
Where through the lattice ivy-shadows crept. (11)

I see esoteric imagination in these verses. Christina gazed at herself on her 'death' bed. Christina's health was always more or less ill disposed. She feared the burst of her disease at all times. It is no doubt that this uneasiness had influence upon her personal imagination. But at the same time it is true that "Christina took the announcement of the disease most bravely." (12)

Before the beginning Thou hast foreknown the end.(13)

This, a kind of power of premonition, was one of her peculiarities. Consequently she was always shadowed by the premonition of 'death.' But I observe that the premonition of 'death' which is detestable for us was a comfort for Christina. 'Death' was nothing but the milestone to be raised to heaven. She waited even for 'death.' Therefore I think she could write a coffin and funeral with a light and hopeful touch. 'The Watchers' and 'Song' (When I am dead, my dearest,) are distinguished poems about it. Here too, Christina dealt with death in an obiective manner.

She fell asleep among the flowers
In the sober autumn hours. (14)

(10) "An End"
(11) "After Death"
(12) William Michel Rossetti: Memoir, p. lix.
(13) "Before the Beginning"
(14) "The Watchers"

In this case, Christina uses 'asleep' for 'death.' In this metaphor I feel a quiet image of 'death.' "Death" is described as a peaceful and affectionate thing. I have never read any poems touched with such hopeful sweetness of 'death' as Christina Rossetti's.

Oh come the day of death, that day
Of rest which cannot pass away: (15)

Christina welcomed death and even longed for it.

O Earth, lie heavily upon her eyes;
Seal her sweet eyes weary of watching, Earth;
Lie close around her; leave no room for mirth
With its harsh laughter, nor for sound of sighs.
She hath no questions, she hath no replies,
Hushed in and curtained with a blessed dearth
Of all that irked her from the hour of birth;
With stillness that is almost Paradise.
Darkness more clear than noon-day holdeth her,
Silence more musical than any song;
Even her very heart has ceased to stir;
Until the morning of Eternity
Her rest shall not begin nor end, but be;
And when she wakes she will not think it long. (16)

I understand by this sonnet that for Christina 'death' was perfect heavenly silence: that it was peacefulness which we shall gain in the end.

Is this the end? is there no end but this?
Yea, none beside:
No other end for pride
And foulness and besottedness. (17)
. . . . . .
Alas for her amid man's helpless moan,
Alas for her;
She hath no comforter:
In solitude of fire she sits alone. (18)

(15) "The Face of the Deep"
(16) "Rest"
(17) "Standing afar off for the fear of her torment"
(18) "Alas for her amid man's helpless moan"

I appreciate the deep loneliness of her soul in these verses. She was alone so much more after her mother's death. I think, without her pious devotion she might have died in agony of deep solitude.[19] Such solitude ruled over her, when she was alone:

> "She sat in the shadowed drawing room, listening vaguely to the sound of rain and wind and human voices and the irregular beating of her heart. Her doctor told William that she was given to long attacks of hysterical weeping." [20]

For all her fervent faith, Christina could not have overcome the near aproach of death. She grew more and more depressed in her later years. Contrary to her hopeful point of view of 'death' in her youth the fear of death could not have been cured in spite of her infinite devotion. I see clearly that she came to be possessed with an inner conflict in her age.

> Mine Angel predilect:
> Veild or unveiled, benignant or austere
> Aloof or near;
> Thine, therefore mine elect. [21]

The angel of death is often seen in her later poems. The angel always puts on dark veil. In the poem of her youth, 'death' appeared before us so romantic, crowned with roses and carrying a white lily. 'Death' became a terror in her later years. But Christina was not beaten by 'death.' She turned her face heavenward seeking perfect heavenly peace.

> It is over. What is over?
> Nay, now much is over truly!——
> Harvest days we toiled to sow for;
> Now the sheaves are gathered newly
> Now the wheat is garnered duly. [22]

She could at last gain what she wanted, freed from her agony.

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(19) M. Zaturenska said in *C. R.* p. 222. "The fear of losing her mother made her heart freeze"

(20) M. Zaturenska: *C. R.* p. 284.

(21) "Mine Angel"

(22) "It is over"

Sleeping at last, the trouble and tumult over,
Sleeping at last, the struggle and horror past
Cold and white, out of sight of friend and of lover,
Sleeping at last.

No more a tired heart downcast or overcast,
No more pangs that wring, or shifting fears that hover,
Sleeping at last in a dreamless sleep locked fast.

Fast asleep. Singing birds in their leafy cover
Cannot wake her, nor shake her the gusty blast.
Under the purple thyme and the purple clover
Sleeping at last. (23)

This is her swansong. This is placed at the end of her devotional poems. Heavenly peace overflows in this verse. On the whole, the variety of these devotional poems strikes me more and more as I read and re-read them.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

What is the essence of Christina's poems? What is the spirit of her poems that Christina wove into poetry? There are two currents as I have indicated in this paper. They are her love of nature and her religious devotion. Her affluent imagination flows over in her nature poems; Her deep longing for nature and her pious devotion never cut off from her are expressed in many of her devotional poems. In other words the former is a state of religious ecstasy, and the latter is self-renunciation. Christina's works include a masterpiece "A Paraphrase on Ecclesiasts." Ecclesiastes explains that the present life is far from satisfactory. Its motif seems to have been cherished in her mind. In her devotional poems Christina placed her soul in the bosome of the maker: She was thus in ecstacies of intercourse with God. She was conscious that the more immeasurable God's love is, the more trivial our existences are. She humbly asked for the low-

(23) "Sleeping At Last"

est place in heaven.(1) I think this humbleness of hers came from her religious ecstasy. L. Hearn took his view that in a sense this humbleness obstructed the full development of her poems in general.(2) The number of her devotional poems amounts to about four hundred and fifty among a thousand whole poems. Excepting eighty seven in four hundred and fifty devotional poems, the rest was written after 1866. It is worthy of our notice that most of devotional poems were written after the renouncement of her second love.(3) The renouncement of her earthly love resulted in self-renunciation in the end. She chose her own way that she wanted to trace, but she could not nevertheless refuse it perfectly. For instance, a masterpiece "Monna Innominata" was dedicated to C. B. Cayley.(4)

I wish I could remember that first day
First hour, first moment of your meeting me,
. . . . . .
Youth gone and beauty gone, what doth remain?
The longing of a heart pent up, forlorn,
A silent heart whose silence loves longs;
The silence of a heart which say its songs
While youth and beauty made a summer moan,
Silence of love that cannot sing again. (5)

"These lines apparently written to an earthly lover had now become the keynote to all her human affections, weakened though they were by pain, exhaustion, and the apprehension of death." (6)

I find a faithful woman's inner conflict between holy love and earthly love in these verses. Christina once said, "My eros is crusified." Notwithstanding, she thought love as a miracle and she waited for it secretly with her throbbing heart. In this point Christina had an inner contradiction. This repressed emotion is poured forth in her verses. "Monna Innominata"

(1) "Give Me the Lowest Place"
(2) "On Poets" p. 210.
(3) She was wooed twice. The first man Was John Collinson. The second man was Charles Bagot Cayley
(4) "Monna Innominata" is a sonnet of sonnets. This is taken plots from Mrs. Browning's "Sonnets from the Portuguese"
(5) "Monna Innominata" 14.
(6) M. Zaturenska: *C. R.* p. 254.

is a dialogue between her human love and her stern faith.

Too late for love, too late for joy,
Too late, too late:
You loitered on the road too long,
You trifled at the gate [7]

It is astonishing that it was written by Christina who had rejected all that was earthly and had wished only to have religions devotion. What is this emotional grief sung here? It is a contradiction and a resistance in the devotional journey the way of which she was following. There was always a struggle in her heart as she had two ancestors of different blood. The conflict rose from between her rigid faith and human heart. In her austere life, her inner conflict strikes me strange when I touch the essence of her verses deeply. It is, to my thinking, nothing but a pathos of humanity that we can never solve. Christina suffered from a disease since her girlhood. Excepting the year of 1861, through her life she always had much physical pain, lung-trouble and heart-trouble.[8] It is natural that Christina should have regarded this present life as "valley of the shadow of death." "Her religious depression was probably due to her ill health and her isolation,"[9] said Zaturenska.

Eye hath not seen nor ear hath heard
Nor heart conceived that full 'enough':
Here moans the separating sea,
Here harvests fail, here breaks the heart:
There God shall join and no man part,
I full of Christ and Christ of me,[10]

. . . . . .

All heaven is blazing yet,
With the meridian sun:
Make haste, unshadowing sun, make haste to set;
O lifeless life, have done.

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(7) "The Prince's Progress." This rhythm in this verse is very wonderful. Christina used repetition of same sound and combination of vowels.

(8) William Michel Rossetti: Memoir, p. IXVIII.

(9) *C. R.* p. 241.

(10) "That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it is Man."

I choose what once I chose;
What once I willed, I will:
Only the heart its own bereavement knows;
O clamorous heart, lie still. (11)

These verses are in a noble harmony with what she strove.

"It is as if she had brooded over what she had written before and had decided that she had blamed herself too much. No, she was right; after all God himself had kept them apart in life, and in his mercy might reunite them after death. But her choice had been right after all.

That which I chose, I choose:
That which I willed, I will;
That which I once refused, I still refuse:
O hope deferred, be still.
That which I chose and choose
And will is Jesus' will:
He hath not lost his life who seems to lose:
O hope deferred, hope still." (12)

Joy is but sorrow,
While we know
It ends to-morrow. (13)

When she was eighteen years old, she already stopped going to theatre on account of her faith. And she renounced courtship twice. After all, her attitude towards life was how to harmonize herself with God and not how to enjoy life.

"Every road now led to the Heavenly City she hoped to reach after this life, her poems were written only for the Great Taskmaster's eye." (14)

Once in a dream I saw the flowers
That bud and bloom in Paradise;
More fair they are than waking eyes
Have seen in all this world of ours. (15)

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(11) "All heaven is blazing yet"
(12) M. Zaturenska: *C. R.* p. 220.
(13) "Joy is but sorrow"
(14) M. Zaturenska: *C. R.* p. 251.
(15) "Paradise"

Here Christina pictures a paradise. She loved the beauty on earth and made many nature poems. Yet, the scenes of Paradise were nothing but Revelation to her. The roses in Paradise are more wonderful than Solomon's rose in Sharon. Roses and lilies and fragrant violets in such poems as the above one are now poured out in her boundless longing for God. There are stairs to reach the Paradise in Christina's "Convent Threshold." Suffering from her inner conflict, Christina went up to Paradise she had been yearning for. Her attitude of mind at which she arrived in the end was the lowest place in Paradise. "Her own last verses breathe a tranquility,"[16] said Zaturenska.

Her last verses are:

> Sleeping at last, the trouble and tumult over,
> Sleeping at last, the struggle and horror past,
> Cold and white, out of sight of friend and of lover,
> Sleeping at last.[17]

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(16) M. Zaturenska: *C. R.* p. 292.
(17) "Sleeping at last"