

Rossetti's *Maude: Prose and Verse* and a reference guide to the writings on Christina Rossetti.

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## CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

### *The Complete Poems*

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Whose milkless mothers butted them,  
 Or who were orphaned of their dams.  
 5 The lambs athirst for mother's milk  
 Filled all the place with piteous sounds:  
 Their mothers' bones made white for miles  
 The pastureless wet pasture grounds.

Day after day, night after night,  
 10 From lamb to lamb the shepherds went,  
 With teapots for the bleating mouths  
 Instead of nature's nourishment.  
 The little shivering gaping things  
 Soon knew the step that brought them aid,  
 15 And fondled the protecting hand,  
 And rubbed it with a woolly head.

Then, as the days waxed on to weeks,  
 It was a pretty sight to see  
 These lambs with frisky heads and tails  
 20 Skipping and leaping on the lea,  
 Bleating in tender, trustful tones,  
 Resting on rocky crag or mound,  
 And following the beloved feet  
 That once had sought for them and found.

25 These very shepherds of their flocks,  
 These loving lambs so meek to please,  
 Are worthy of recording words  
 And honour in their due degrees:  
 So I might live a hundred years,  
 30 And roam from strand to foreign strand,  
 Yet not forget this flooded spring  
 And scarce-saved lambs of Westmoreland.

## A BIRTHDAY.

My heart is like a singing bird  
 Whose nest is in a watered shoot;

My heart is like an apple tree  
 Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit;  
 5 My heart is like a rainbow shell  
 That paddles in a halcyon sea;  
 My heart is gladder than all these  
 Because my love is come to me.

Raise me a dais of silk and down;  
 10 Hang it with vair and purple dyes;  
 Carve it in doves and pomegranates,  
 And peacocks with a hundred eyes;  
 Work it in gold and silver grapes,  
 In leaves and silver fleurs-de-lys;  
 15 Because the birthday of my life  
 Is come, my love is come to me.

## REMEMBER.

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.  
 5 Remember me when no more day by day  
 You tell me of our future that you planned:  
 Only remember me; you understand  
 It will be late to counsel then or pray.  
 Yet if you should forget me for a while  
 10 And afterwards remember, do not grieve:  
 For if the darkness and corruption leave  
 A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,  
 Better by far you should forget and smile  
 Than that you should remember and be sad.

## AFTER DEATH.

The curtains were half drawn, the floor was swept  
 And strewn with rushes, rosemary and may

do so' ('Notes' 481). WR included a parody that had appeared in 'some illustrated comic paper', saying that CR had pasted it into a copy of 1875. The parody – about the visit of a mother-in-law – begins, 'My heart is like one asked to dine / Whose evening dress is up the spout', and ends, 'Because the mother of my wife / Has come – and means to stay with me'.

1 *My heart is like a singing bird* cf. 'My heart is as a freeborn bird' ('Three Nuns', l. 124).

6 *halcyon* calm; from a bird in an ancient fable thought to breed during the winter solstice on a nest floating on the sea, which charmed the winds and waves so that the sea was especially calm during this time.

10 *vair* fur obtained from a black and white squirrel; one of the heraldic furs.

14 *fleurs-de-lys* heraldic lily borne upon the royal arms of France.

## REMEMBER

[Composed 25 July 1849. Editions: 1862, 1865, 1866a, 1875, 1876a, 1904.]

Cf. Shakespeare, Sonnet 71, 'No longer mourn for me' (*CR Poems* 431).

## AFTER DEATH

[Composed 28 April 1849. Editions: 1862, 1865, 1866a, 1875, 1876a, 1904.]

2 *rosemary* emblematic of remembrance. Cf. Ophelia: 'There's rosemary, that's for remembrance. Pray you, love, remember' (*Hamlet* IV.v.172).

## AN END

[Composed 5 March 1849. Editions: 1862, 1865, 1866a, 1875, 1876a, 1904. First published in *Germ*, no. 1 (Jan. 1850), 48; also published in William Allingham (ed.), *Nightingale Valley, A Collection of Choice Lyrics and Short Poems* (Bell and Daldy, 1859).]

1 *Love, strong as Death, is dead* 'for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave' (Song of Sol. 8:6).

## MY DREAM

[Composed 9 March 1855. Editions: 1862, 1865, 1866a, 1875, 1876a, 1904.]

*Illustration*: 'I possess a little bit of paper, containing three illustrations of her own to *The Dream*, and bearing the date 16 March '55. There is (1) the dreamer

slumbering under a tree, from which the monarch crocodile dangles; (2) the crocodile sleeping with "unstrung claw," as the "winged vessel" approaches; and (3) the crocodile as he reared up in front of the vessel, and "wring his hands" ('Notes' 479).

... in a copy of her collected edition of 1875, I find that she has marked the piece 'not a real dream.' As it was not a real dream, and she chose nevertheless to give it verbal form, one seeks for a meaning in it, and I for one cannot find any that bears development. She certainly liked the poem... I may add that, for some reason as untraceable perhaps as that which guided Christina in the writing of *The Dream*, Dante Gabriel bestowed the name of 'the prudent crocodile' (from this poem) upon Mr. William Morris [1834–96], and the nickname found favour with some other members of our circle. ('Notes' 479)

In a letter to DGR [23 Dec. 1864], CR wrote: 'But I am so happy in my nest of crocodiles that I beg you will on no account purchase the Prudent to laud [*sic*] it over them...' (*Letters*, I, 208). WR identifies 'the nest of crocodiles' as a drawing by Grisct (Ernest Grisct, illustrator of children's books), given to CR by DGR, and 'the Prudent' as a separate large Grisct, which DGR purchased for CR (*Letters*, I, 209 n. 1).

Marsh finds antecedents for the crocodile of this poem in Thomas de Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1822) and in Thomas Beddoes's *A Crocodile* (1851) and 'Song by Isbrand' in *Death's Jest-Book* (1850), 'a Rossetti favourite' (*CR* 167; *CR Poems* 162). The Middle Eastern images Marsh sees as connected to events occurring at this time in CR's life: she went to a party wearing a Syrian costume brought back from the Middle East by Tom Seddon, the companion on that trip of William Holman Hunt (1827–1910), painter and member of the PRB. Seddon, soon after, held an exhibition of his Middle Eastern landscapes (*CR* 164–5).

3 *Euphrates* one of the four rivers of Paradise and the river on which Babylon was located.

4 *Jordan* river where Jesus was baptized.

26 *battened* fed gluttonously; grew fat. Cf. 'If Death were seen / At first as Death, Love had not been... / Or in his coarsest Satyr-shape / Had bruised the herb and crushed the grape, / And basked and battened in the woods' (Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–92), *In Memoriam* (1850), XXXV, 18–19, 22–4).

48 *shed appropriate tears* 'crocodile tears' are shed hypocritically.

## SONG ['Oh roses for the flush of youth']

[Composed 6 Feb. 1849. Editions: 1862, 1865, 1866a, 1875, 1876a, 1904. First published in *Germ*, no. 2 (Feb. 1850), 64.]

Cf. Ophelia's lines in *Hamlet* IV.v.172–93.