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Christina Rossetti is regarded as one of the great Victorian poets. Her poetry spans many centuries and include the distinct element of religion. As the youngest of four children, Christina's mother taught her English, French and Italian Literature as well as the Bible and Orthodox Anglican religion. The close family environment, with its emphasis on learning and its religious disputes, formed the foundation of Christina's mature character. She was loyal to her mother and remained at home for her entire life as she took care of her family and the household. This loyalty to her mother and her religion influenced her decision not to marry the two men she loved. Both men were not members of the Church of England. Her poetry reflects the love she has for her family, her religious devotion, and her despair at the painful self-denial which her family and religion forced on her. Although Christina was often ill, she continued to write poetry, stories, and books on religion throughout her life. Christina is famous for her ballads and religious lyrics. The use of symbolism and her passionate feelings highlights the religious nature of her life. The poem "A Birthday" maintains a religious theme throughout the poem and the writer makes clear reference to her views on how religion shapes every aspect of one's life.

The speaker in the poem reveals her delightful anticipation at the birthday of her love. This upcoming event is special to her. She compares her heart's happiness to different concepts in the world. In the poem "A Birthday", Rossetti makes use of imagery as she points to "the singing bird" ("Birthday" 1) and the "rainbow shell" ("Birthday" 5) "in a halcyon sea" ("Birthday" 6). She first experiences love on this particular birthday. She further conveys her happiness as a "well - watered shoot" ("Birthday" 2)

that nourishes the life of birds and providing food for harvest. This feeling adds to the royalty of the images presented.

Based on the fact that Rossetti's life was devoted to religion, the idea of a birthday is grounded in the concept of a spiritual birth and not so much in a physical one. Line eleven speaks to the platform which she wants carved in "doves and pomegranates/and peacocks with a hundred eyes" ("A Birthday", 11-12). One can easily see that Rossetti speaks to the purity and innocence of her religious beliefs. The doves and pomegranates are common and so is love. From a religious standpoint, the dove represents the Holy Spirit as with the story of the dove flying away at the baptism of Jesus in the Bible and the white dove leaving Noah's ark to find the new world. The pomegranates represents the resurrection, and the dais depicts the church as she moves towards committing her life to the Lord.

The poem's literal meaning suggests that it is about Rossetti's love for any of the suitors who pursued her vigorously at the time. However, an analysis of Rossetti's Christian background suggests that the birthday represents her new love for God. The lively tone in the poem is in direct contrast to most of her other poems. The images flow smoothly throughout the two octets. Each of the octets contains eight syllables per line. Rossetti skillfully separates her happiness from the preparations she must make for the arrival of her love. The first octet makes use of nature and the imagery in the octet shows her intense love. The second octet shows the value of her love. The images of gold and silk allude to royalty and the reader immediately realizes that her love is priceless.

The structure of the poem is similar to that of a hymn that focuses on love.

The use of simile further highlights the comparisons of her love to nature in stanza one. This comparison alludes to the profusion and ordinary, healthy love and the symbolic nature of a fresh life, rebirth, and anticipation. The iambic rhythm adds to the urgency of her anticipation and how her heart feels. One may say that it is similar to the beating of the heart. The use of similes in stanza one reinforces the idea that the love the speaker is feeling marks the start of a joyous and excited event.

The biblical allusion in the poem is heightened as one analyzes the true meaning of the rainbow in line five. The rainbow symbolizes the promise that God made to Noah, that he would not create another flood. Furthermore, her Christian faith is strong and the love she speaks so freely of could signify the period of Easter along with the season of spring. Both periods during the year represent a new start and renewal of life. There is no doubt that the nature images represent the arrival of spring. In addition, the "Second Coming of Christ" is similar to a birthday. To the Christian person, Easter is the time that Jesus rises from the dead to bring new life to sinners. This birthday that Rossetti celebrates, suggests a new beginning and a new life. Rossetti constantly makes reference to this period in time as it is fundamental to Christianity. The believers in Christianity know that the Second Coming means that the Earth that exists today will one day be replaced with the return of the Lord. The portrayal of the "dais" ("Birthday" 9) hung with "vair and purple dyes" ("Birthday" 10) symbolizes the Temple of Jerusalem in the Old Testament. This imagery is significant as it refers to the presence of God on Earth.

Line two "Nest is in a water'd shoot" ("Birthday" 2) indicates that the

speaker believes that her heart is comfortable and she can live because she is comfortable. The entire poem reflects the birth of new ideas and life. It is spring and the end of the winter season. The trees blossom, the birds sing, and the plants shoot. "Shoot" ("Birthday" 2) refers to the initial stages in the birth of a plant. In describing a shoot that is watered fully, the speaker presents the concept of abundance and productiveness. On the other hand, instead of building the nest in a tree that is fully grown, the singing bird gravitates towards a one that is new and fresh. The older tree, like love and life is easily destroyed. The watering of the shoot alludes to the religious nature in that, the book of Isaiah in Old Testament points to God's promise to direct and provide for mankind.

In line nine, the speaker makes reference to 'dais' ("Birthday" 9) as a raised platform in a church where the altar and the communion table stand.

Rossetti makes reference to the dais as it is common feature in the Anglican Church. Her religious ties to the church clearly have an impact on the comparisons used in the poem. The structure that she sees is a form of celebration for her love. The soft and luxurious materials which make her dais suggest a light tone. In addition, the rhyming pattern occurs in every second line. It adds to the feeling of comfort that the speaker wishes to impose on the reader. The poet uses the rhymes on every second line creates a sense of reliance and suggests that one can count on love in time of stress. In addition, the use of this simple rhyming scheme to show that love makes everything in the world simple.

In the poem, the second line is indented. It creates another literary device as the indenting acts as an extension the previous thoughts of the first line.

Each indented line adds a new and separate idea as the speaker tries to express the love that she is feeling. The indented lines further adds details that suggests that the speaker finds it difficult to express her thoughts with just a few words and as such she needs to create an additional line to continue her thoughts. The poet uses the full-stop only at the end of each stanza. The ideas flow freely and are separated by the semi-colon. The use of the semi-colon enhances the free - flow of the speaker's excitement of the arrival of her love. Therefore, each stanza represents one sentence. The full-stop represents finality to the speaker's thoughts. She notes " love is come to me" (" Birthday" 8).

The poet uses language that is similar to that used in Songs of Solomon the Old Testament. The love poems of Solomon are similar to the comparative love of the speaker to nature. The speaker reflects on the joys of love being in love in a powerful way and likens this to nature. The speaker finds happiness in the love of her life. Regardless of who the speaker loves, the presence of the lover offers comfort and happiness. In both stanzas, the speaker talks about love, but in two separate tones. Stanza one speaks to a passive type of love as she shows possession of the lover.

She uses the personal pronoun " my" to point out that this love belongs to her. On the other hand, the second stanza speaks to an active type of love. The speaker becomes commanding and throughout the sentence the speaker makes use of commanding phrases such as " Carve it in doves and pomegranates" (" Birthday" 11), " Hang it with vairs and purple dyes" (" Birthday" 10) and " Raise me a dais of silk and down" (" Birthday" 9). The use of the repetition of " my heart" shows the possessive nature of the

speaker. The speaker points to “ My heart is gladder than all of these” (“ Birthday” 7) show that although she compares her love to a number of things in nature, her love is greater than everything else. In other words, the speaker believes that her love is incomparable to anything else in the world. The poet uses “ the birthday” (“ Birthday” 15) to emphasize the idea that the birthday is special and unlike any other birthday. One could say that the speaker uses the definite article to point out that birthday is one of the annual events that mark the passage of time in the life of an individual, but “ the birthday” (“ Birthday” 15) is more specific. It serves as a pointer that the day would be unlike any other and even more special than all other birthdays. Furthermore, it appears that the speaker want the reader to appreciate the day as much as she enjoys the day. It is an unusual expression, yet it adds an air of urgency that draws the reader to think carefully of the number of reasons for the obsessive anticipation that the speaker displays towards her love. She pulls the reader back into her fold as she reverts to the personal pronouns 'me' and 'my' in the final two lines of the poem. The speaker uses the personal pronoun “ my” often to show that her love is more of a possession and makes the speaker self-focused. The speaker creates a vivid image with the reference to “ my heart is like an apple tree” (“ Birthday”, 3). From a religious perspective, the reference to the apples creates the biblical allusion of the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve. The period before that the “ fall” from grace suggests that the perfect peace with nature and each existed and that her love is similar to that peace. In addition, the Book of Proverbs refers to the “ Tree of Life”, which indicates that whoever embraces this tree also embrace constant blessings.

However, at the end of the stanza one, the reader finds that the speaker believes that her love is greater than the natural world.

In concluding, Rossetti's poem, "A Birthday" is based on the religious nature of her social upbringing. She talks about a love that is greater than everything in nature. She anticipates the arrival of her love with much enthusiasm. The reader is left to wonder at the type of love that surpasses the boundaries of nature. There is no doubt that the love Rossetti feels is beyond mortal comprehension. It reflects a love for God and the Second Coming. The birthday is unlike any other birthdays and the season of spring serves to highlight a new birth and not just the passing of time in Rossetti's life.