Through the Window of Painting: A Study of Christina Rossetti's Devotional Poetry

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This paper surveys the possibility of pictorialisation (pictorialisability) of Christina Rossetti's devotional pieces from the viewpoint of painting, specially executed by her contemporary painters. Through the interpretation of the original poems and the paintings, and the comparison between them, it searches for clues to the pictorialisability of Christina's non-'pictorial' poetry.

Introduction

Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830-1894) shared with her brother, the famous painter and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), the belief that 'poetry must to a large degree be pictorial' (Bowra 247). It goes without saying that her poetry was subject to the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites. It seems that 'pictorial' means the rigorously realistic depiction required by their early aim 'to bring art back to the fidelity of nature' (Johnson 23): in other words, 'delicate, ornamental, and romantic details are inserted into a carefully arrested architectural, domestic, or historical frame, causing motions to seem simultaneously intense and slow, passionate and heavy.' (Boos 105). Christina's *Goblin Market* (1862) is said to be the most Pre-Raphaelite of her works in its various 'pictorial' details. The first edition of *Goblin Market* and of her other lyrics were illustrated by her brother, which is an assertion of the pictorialisability — the possibility of pictorialisation (execution of a painting based on the pictorial quality) — of Christina's lyrical world. When Dante Gabriel was too busy with his own work, he asked his friends to illustrate his sister's poems. Certainly there are some differences between the illustrations of Dante Gabriel and those of his friends in the interpretation and presentation of Christina's poems, but all of those illustrations are faithful to the 'pictorial' elements of the original poems, such as the colourism and detailed description, and various emblems as seen in the Pre-Raphaelite paintings.

On the other hand, the pictorialisability of her devotional pieces has never been paid attention to, because they are generally not 'pictorial' in the Pre-Raphaelite sense. Neither Dante Gabriel nor Christina herself had ever thought of pictorialising (executing a painting based on) them or even illustrating them. However, there are real examples where Christina's devotional poems strongly inspired her contemporary painters, especially Symbolist ones, to depict her inner nature in their paintings. These paintings, different from mere illustrations, are realised in a form of pictorialisation, which vividly visualises her poetic world.

This paper will survey the pictorialisability of Christina's devotional works from the viewpoint of painting, specially executed by Christina's contemporary painters. It will introduce some works by the painters who were inspired when they read her poems. The first section will introduce two paintings which went missing after they were exhibited for the first time. The second and third sections will investigate the other paintings which still now exist: *The Watchers* (1873-76) by William Blake Richmond (1842-1921), and *Who Shall Deliver Me?* (1891) and *I lock my door upon myself* (1891) by Fernand Khnopff (1858-1921). Through the interpretation of the original poems and the paintings, and the comparison between them, the paper will search for clues to the pictorialisability of Christina's non-'pictorial' poetry.

I

About Christina's devotional pieces, no critics have

ever paid attention to their pictorialisability. Even Dante Gabriel, who was keen on illustrating his sister's works, never thought of pictorialising or even illustrating her devotional poetry. However, there are real examples where Christina's poems strongly inspired her contemporary painters to reproduce her poetic world by means of their paintings: Joseph Jopling (1831-1884) painted *Lady Maggie* (1868) after Christina's 'Maggie A Lady' (1865); Eliza Martin dedicated her *Life is nor good* (1868) to Christina's 'Life and Death' (1863); William Blake Richmond produced a painting titled *The Watchers* (1873-76) after Christina's poem 'The Watchers' (1850); Fernand Khnopff created two paintings after Christina's devotional piece 'Who Shall Deliver Me?' (1864), one of which is titled *Who Shall Deliver Me?* (1891) and the other is *I lock my door upon myself* (1891).

Coincidentally both Jopling's *Lady Maggie* and Martin's *Life is nor good* were executed in 1868 and exhibited at the Dudley Gallery in 1869 (Olmsted 40). After the exhibition these two paintings went missing from the public. Although there is no record in her biographies, even in Jan Marsh's (1994), it is quite possible that Christina visited the gallery to look at them at that time.

Looking at other paintings at that time (1860s), the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites was unavoidable, though few of the painters remained faithful to the Pre-Raphaelite creed which demanded too rigorous discipline and practice to be sustained. Some had then already turned to the manner of Victorian genre paintings 'full of anecdotal detail which requires us to "read" it like a contemporary novel' (Christian 24). In the case of Jopling, he was a genre painter, a frequent contributor of domestic subjects to the exhibitions of the Royal Academy. It is possible to imagine that Jopling might have been under the Pre-Raphaelite influence in realistic depiction, but at the same time the detail of his genre painting must be 'read' as prose. It is a shame that we cannot look closely at the poem and the painting together to see the communication between Christina's 'pictorial' verse and Jopling's 'prosaic' painting.

The original poem 'Life and Death,' cited below, is reminiscent both of the typically Pre-Raphaelite 'A Birthday' (1857) in the pictorial quality and of 'When I am dead, my dearest' (1848) in the negative language. Another interesting point is that the poem treats the theme of sleep = death, rather than using the pictorial elements:

> Life is not good. One day it will be good
> To die, then live again;
> To sleep meanwhile; so, not feel the wane
> Of shrunk leaves dropping in the wood,
> Nor hear the foamy lashing of the main,
> Nor mark the blackened bean-fields, nor,
> where stood
> Rich ranks of golden grain,
> Only dead refuse stubble clothe the plain:
> Asleep from risk, asleep from pain.
> (10-18)

Here 'sleep' is used as a metaphor of death. Christina repeats this metaphor persistently. Life is not sweet nor good but weary to her and her speaker, waiting for salvation and resurrection after 'sleep.' The speaker sounds like that of 'When I am dead, my dearest' who looks at her lover after her death from the graveyard where her body is buried. The graveyard is a threshold of Heaven and this world, and the place for rest and sleep. The aspiration for death as the escape from real life is seen in a fragmentary poem dated in 1849, written by the young Christina:

> Sleep, let me sleep, for I am sick of care;
> Sleep, let me sleep, for my pain wearies me.

This theme of sleep = death obsessed Christina until her last poem in 1894, echoing as the refrain of 'Sleeping at last.'

In 'Life and Death,' the time and space of the poem continues from the present to the future. This exposition of the temporal and spatial expanse of 'sleep = death' constructs a huge hall of death in Christina's poetic world. It is particular to Christina's whole works. She loves the idea that the period between death and the Last Judgement is a sleep, presumably as a peaceful escape. Because it is now impossible to look at Martin's original painting, we have no idea how Martin pictorialised the shadow of death = sleep in her painting.

The next two sections will introduce the two painters and their three significant paintings and analyse the paintings compared with the original poems:

William Blake Richmond's *The Watchers* (1873-76), Fernand Khnopff's *Who Shall Deliver Me?* (1891) and his *I lock my door upon myself* (1891).

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William Blake Richmond produced a painting titled *The Watchers* (1873-76) after Christina's poem 'The Watchers' (1850); Fernand Khnopff (1858-1921) executed two paintings after Christina's devotional piece 'Who Shall Deliver Me?' (1864), which are titled *Who Shall Deliver Me?* (1891) and *I lock my door upon myself* (1891). From these examples, it may be declared that some elements of Christina's poetry inspired her contemporary Symbolist painters. This brings up a question: what elements of her poetry did inspire the painters? For in the case of 'Who Shall Deliver Me?' there is no 'pictorial' element but latent images. This section will survey what element might inspire the painter to pictorialise the poem, in a discussion of the original poem.

Few critics of literature have considered or discussed these poems, and no one has pointed out from the literary viewpoint that there are paintings inspired by the poems. Some critics of fine art have introduced the poem as they considered a painting as a part of Khnopff's abundant works, but their introduction is not sufficient enough to analyse the particular relevance between the poem and the painting. Even the most motivated critic of Khnopff, Jeffery W. Howe, does not enter into a detailed analysis of the relevance between the poem and the painting in his book, despite one chapter (105-116) which he devotes to closely examining the painting. As for *The Watchers* and Richmond, few references have been seen either to the painting or to the painter.

Therefore, these two sections will also examine the neglected subject, the relevance between the original poems and the paintings. In order to find a clue to these problems, let us start with observing each of the poems and the paintings carefully before moving on to an analysis of what elements did inspire the painters by a comparison between the poems and the paintings.

For the present, it may be useful to look more closely at two of the important features of Christina's poetry. One is, as already pointed out in the previous section, the theme of 'sleep = death.' The other is her habit of repetition which even a simple observation would easily find. As seen in the case of 'Life and Death' in the previous section, 'sleep = death' is a repetitive theme throughout Christina's poetry. Her inclination to the idea that the period between death and the Last Judgement is a sleep, is rather an obsession with the aspiration for escape from the prison of this world. The metaphor of sleep for death is common in poetry in general. For example, Edmund Spenser's speaker says in *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579) 'Till my last sleepe Doe close mine eyes' (August); John Donne's sonnet 'This is my play's last scene' in *Holy Sonnets* (1633) accords with Christina's notion in these lines, 'And gluttonous death, will instantly unjoint/ My body, and soul, and I shall sleep a space,' (3: 5-6); and Christina's contemporary, Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-82) says in *The Minor Prophets with a commentary* (1860), 'They slept the sleep from which they shall not awake until the Judgement Day' (378). Among them, Christina is the one that repeats the metaphor most frequently in the devotional poetry. Her habit of repetition is found not only in the theme but in the vocabulary.

To Christina, repetition is the most familiar technique to limit her vocabulary and make her diction simple, for restraint on her thoughts in order to convey them to plain people or even young children. Generally repetition has two effects. One is attracting a reader's attention, making him anticipate a certain pattern of repetition, and filling the listener's expectation when it becomes the realisation of what was anticipated. Another effect of repetition is that repeated words and phrases foreground a word or phrase which appears only once. Such a least frequent word or phrase emerges from an enumeration of the repeated words to the reader's consciousness. The other is causing a feeling of surprise when the reader's expectation does not prove correct. When a quite unexpected phrase or line turns up as new information to the reader, he takes notice of the new information and unconsciously ignores the repeated part as old information. That is, the least frequent word or phrase emerges from an enumeration of the repeated words to the reader's consciousness. The effect often supports a thematic tension, or even a climax in the text.

Keeping those points on mind, let us look at one of the original poems, 'The Watchers' (1850):

She fell asleep among the flowers
In the sober autumn hours.

Three there are about her bed,
At her side and feet and head.

At her head standeth the Cross
For which all else she counted loss;

Still and steadfast at her feet
Doth her Guardian Angel sit:

Prayers of truest love abide
Wrapping her on every side.

The Holy Cross standeth alone,
Beneath the white moon, whitest stone.

Evil spirits come not near
Its shadow, shielding from all fear:

Once she bore it in her breast,
Now it certifies her rest.

Humble violets grow around
Its base, sweetening the grassy ground,

Leaf-hidden; so she hid from praise
Of men her pious holy ways.

Higher about it, twining close,
Clingeth a crimson thorny rose:

So from her heart's good seed of love
Thorns sprang below, flowers spring above.

Though yet his vigil doth not cease,
Her Angel sits in perfect peace,

With white folded wings: for she
He watches, now is pure as he.

He watches with his loving eyes
For the day when she shall rise:

When full of glory and of grace
She shall behold him face to face.

Though she is safe for ever, yet
Human love doth not forget:

But prays that in her deep
Grave she may sleep a blessed sleep,

Till when time and the world are past
She may find mercy at the last.

So these three do hedge her in
From sorrow, as death does from sin.

So freed from earthly taint and pain
May they all meet in Heaven. Amen.

The scene recalls a graveyard filled with flowers, moonshine, and autumnal air, where there is an absolute severance between the sleeper and the watchers. There are also seen emblems — which can also be considered to be particularly 'pictorial' in Christina's poetry whether they are Pre-Raphaelite or not — such as 'the flowers,' 'the Cross,' 'the white moon,' 'the grassy glass,' 'a crimson thorny rose,' 'folded wings,' 'deep grave' and so on. The viewpoint of the narrator moves in circularity from the three 'watchers' together to each separately, to her (the sleeper), and then returns to the three.

Looking at the structure of the poem briefly, this poem consists of twenty-one couplets, full of alliteration, assonance, and consonance. The twenty couplets are self-enclosed, keeping independent of each other. Only the ninth couplet enjambs, and the lines of these couplets enjamb, too. The woman (the sleeper) and her piety are compared to 'humble violets,' which is the most impressive emblem in the poem, effectively supported by the enjambments.

The most frequent word is 'love' throughout the poem, but it is too scattered to have effect of repetition. The epizeuxis of 'sleep' (first as a verb, and then as a noun) is more effective to develop an image, in this case an image of sleep, into a main theme of the poem. Only before reaching the ending, the 'sleep' echoes twice and the rhyme three times in succession of 'deep,' 'sleep' (verb), and 'sleep' (noun) as if it were a triple incantation:

But prays that in her deep
Grave she may sleep a blessed sleep,
(35-36)

The full rhyme of 'sleep' and 'deep' echoes the true eternity of deep sleep, which makes the readers take a glance of the fathomless grave of sleep.

The poem expatiates a scene full of emblems, situated in a concretely depicted setting, all of which could be called 'pictorial' (with colourism and detailed description, and emblems). There are seen a few of the Pre-Raphaelite emblems such as 'rose,' 'violet,' and 'crimson,' though they do not suffice as much for intensifying the Pre-Raphaelite features as in 'A Birthday,' for example. In this case, such emblems are the pictorial quality, which invokes an 'already programmed reaction' (Boos 67) in the painter's mind. The violet is symbolic of modesty, humble life and secrecy, in general. The emblem of 'humble violets' would invoke mourning for the sleeper whose modest, pious life is hidden from the eye.

As touched on above, the viewpoint follows the three watchers: the Cross stands at her head; her Guardian Angel sits at her feet; prayers of truest love abide at her side. The scene comprises the narrow, closed world of a flowery grave; the sleep as a temporary rest before the Judgement Day; a woman buried deep under the grassy ground, confined by sleep; the three watchers surrounding her; and the crucial separation between them. This narrowness and closeness can be identified with that of the self-enclosed couplets of the original poem. Each stanza develops independently like a diminutive picture into the scene of the whole.

And then, a painter read this poem, was inspired by it, and executed a painting based on it: Richmond's *The Watchers* (figure 1). This painting indicates a woman wrapped in white and lying on a pedestal or a coffin in a room (not a grave); three angels surrounding her as watchers (the Cross and the 'prayers of truest love' are personified into two angels; therefore there is no Cross in the painting); something like a picture on either side; and a wide open window with a bright view. Two of the angels sit facing each other, their heads drooping sadly. From the open window the other is leaning into the room. Normal high-church doctrine at that time was that one had not several but only one guardian angel. In Christina's poem, 'watch' means 'remain awake for devotion; to keep vigil' or 'to guard (a dead body or God).' Thus 'watcher' means 'one who watches by the dead.' At the same time, 'watcher' means 'the title of a class of angles or of angels generally' (OED). This must be the reason why Richmond has painted three angels guarding the sleeper (the dead woman). He has taken out the Cross and the high-church doctrine, and brought three angels from Italian classic paintings which he was immersed in while he studied the traditional technique of mural paintings in Italy. There is no sign of life, such as grass, rose, violet, because Richmond has changed the grassy graveyard into a room with a window. From the window, the 'white moon' floods the whole scene with its white illumination. All the things inside the room — the pedestal or coffin, the walls, the floor, the white cloths, and the two angels — protect or confine the woman, but the open window offers escape as the other angel suggests escape from the outside. There is another world spreading over the window, with the shadow of something as huge as a mountain.

All the elements but the open window in the painting respond to the sense of closeness: the sleep (= death) is a temporary rest which obliges the woman to stay on the pedestal or coffin in the room; the narrow, cold, closed space of a room without any flowers nor plants, nor sign of life; the woman, rather than being buried deep under the grassy ground, tightly bound and facing vertically upwards, completely confined to death (=sleep); with their wings closed, the three watchers drooping down and surrounding her.

The proportion of the canvas is equivalent to that of the body, because the chest of the corpse is the centre of the perspective. Therefore strictly observing, the left and right parts are not symmetrical: the right space is physically larger than the left; the curtain on the right side is drawn wider than the other; the angel on the right side stretches wider than the one on the left; the middle angel's spread wing enters into the right space while his other wing is half-hidden behind the curtain on the left side; and the outline of the shaded middle angel (the spread wing and the head) makes both a contrast in colour and a correspondence in shape to the upper outline of the white body. This asymmetry helps the isosceles triangle made by the three watchers to keep the golden section, whose completeness strengthens the

confinement of the sleeper.

As seen in the cases of 'Life and Death' (1863), the obsessive theme of 'sleep = death' again expands a sense of time to eternity, where the time and space of the poem continues from the present to the future. This exposition of the temporal and spatial expanse of 'sleep = death' constructs a huge hall of death both in the poem and in the painting.

Seemingly what inspired the painter in the original poem was not only its 'pictorial' quality (colourism and detailed description, and various emblems) but the theme of 'sleep = death' and the description of 'the three watchers.' Richmond has located the centre of the original poem in the closeness of sleep, and pictorialised the closeness first by painting the image that emerges from the spellbinding echo of 'deep sleep' and the metaphor of 'sleep,' and then by setting the graveyard scene of the poem in the interior of a room and making the three watchers balance completely. There is a contrast between the woman and the watchers: while the woman is bound tightly and placed as the centre, the three watchers are the only mobile creatures in the painting. At the same time, the painter recreated the expanse of the death world through the open window as an escape, instead of a cold, dark catacomb without escape.

Ⅲ

We may now proceed to a more elaborate investigation of another poem, 'Who Shall Deliver Me?' (1864):

God strengthen me to bear myself;
That heaviest weight of all to bear,
Inalienable weight of care.

All others are outside myself;
I lock my door and bar them out,
The turmoil, tedium, gad-about.

I lock my door upon myself,
And bar them out; but who shall wall
Self from myself, most loathed of all?

If I could once lay down myself,
And start self-purged upon the race
That all must run! Death runs apace.

If I could set aside myself,
And start with lightened heart upon
The road by all men overgone!

God harden me against myself,
This coward with pathetic voice
Who craves for ease, and rest, and joys:

Myself, arch-traitor to myself;
My hollowest friend, my deadliest foe,
My clog whatever road I go.

Yet One there is can curb myself,
Can roll the strangling load from me,
Break off the yoke and set me free.

Christina has the habit of repeating the exact same line or a line with similar word order in the devotional pieces. Such a habit of repeating the same line is found not only within one work but even in several different poems: 'The Heart knoweth' (1852) and 'Whatsoever is right' (1852); 'When my heart is vexed' (1886) and 'Ye Have Forgotten' (1854); 'The day is at hand' (1886) and 'The Heart Knoweth' (1857). Christina repeats the first line of a stanza in the same way as she addresses God. It may be said that her devotional pieces are rather a prayer than a poem.

In addition to the repetition of the first line, the form of triplet deserves careful attention. She composed many devotional poems, but the triplet seems to hold a notable position among them. For apart from 'A Royal Princess' (1861), all the triplet poems of Christina's are devotional pieces. To say the least, the triplet is particularly the form which supports her religious thoughts. The reason why Christina chose the triplet as a suitable verse form for devotional pieces must be simply for symbolising completeness in the Christian sense. Generally three is a mystic number in Christianity, and to Christina herself, too, it is a significant number as seen in the 'three' watchers.

Moving to the structure of the poem, this poem consists of eight self-enclosed triplets, all of which keep independent of each other, basically similar to the self-enclosed couplet of 'The Watchers' in this respect. It is also realised that locally repetitive words, such as 'bear' 'weight' 'run' and so on, gradually reinforce a cer-

tain image, but consequently limit the breadth of vocabulary. As mentioned above, Christina has the habit of repetition in style. She never used a complicated metaphor nor an involved image either, but often cited phrases directly from the Authorised Version of the Bible which was the wellspring of her creativity, as we can see that she derived the title of this poem ('Who Shall Deliver Me?') from *Romans* vii, 24: 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' Thus, her poetry is characterised by simplicity, clarity, and integrity, reflecting her religious attitude of self-restriction.

Only the seventh stanza consists of a line-up of these five nouns in apposition: 'myself,' 'arch-traitor,' 'my hollowest friend,' 'my deadliest foe,' and 'my clog.' Other stanzas consist of a complete sentence. In terms of the effects of repetition, the seventh stanza indicates a thematic tension by breaking the pattern of complete sentences and taking the stanza and the lines to pieces with the appositive nouns. These separate nouns connote the conflict between the divided 'myself's.

The speaker appears to resign herself to her captive situation as fate, and submit and trust to God. Eventually in spite of her hostility to 'myself' as a clog, the speaker cannot do anything against it in this world as long as she is connected with it by the 'yoke,' unless she dies. The one that the speaker begs her salvation for is Christ, in accordance with the original phrase from *Romans* vii, 24 -25: 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?/ I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.' Here it is noticed that the speaker describes the conventional dualism, namely, of flesh and soul. In the final stanza of the poem, there is an answer to the question raised in the third stanza, 'who shall wall/ Self from myself, most loathed of all?' in other words, 'Who Shall Deliver Me?' The answer is, simply according to the Bible, Christ.

Christina often personifies death as 'Death.' In this case the reason why 'death' begins with a capital letter is not only because the word is placed at the beginning of a sentence but because the personification emphasises the strength of death. In addition, the shortest sentence 'Death runs apace,' whose shortness makes it quite conspicuous, is placed in the centre of the poem. The whole poem is overcast with the shadow of death. The speaker has been praying to God to strengthen and harden her, but finally, finds out that when her peerless competitor 'Death' wins, the result will immediately terminate the conflict between 'me' and 'myself' or the several 'myself's. Although the answer to the title 'Who Shall Deliver Me?' is Christ, the central theme of the poem is 'Death' both locally and literally.

However, the meaning of death is not necessarily the mortality of flesh to Christina. The significance of death to her is rather the delivery from the divided self, the sense of alienation and ambivalence, and all the restriction on her, than the release from flesh, sin, and mortality. All that she and her speaker seek is death in the form of sleep and rest. 'The Dream' (1847) treats rest as a kind of deliverance:

> Rest, rest; the troubled breast
> Panteth evermore for rest: —
> Be it sleep, or be it death,
> Rest is all it coveteth. (1-4)

To observe the structure of the poem 'Who Shall deliver Me?' again in the point of repetition, there is found the continuous repetition of 'myself' which is opposed to another repeated word 'all.' The effect is that the emphasis of the repeated word 'myself' attracts a reader's attention to the antithesis between 'myself' and 'all.' At the same time, as mentioned at the beginning of this section, the least frequent word or phrase is foregrounded by these repeated words, effective in bringing about a thematic tension, or a climax in the text. The central sentence in the poem 'Death runs apace' is an appropriate example. Another example is the phrase 'upon myself' in the repetition of 'I lock my door ...' in the second and third stanzas. The first time the sentence is only 'I lock my door and bar them out' and the second time it is 'I lock my door upon myself,/ And bar them out.' The repetition plays the role of making readers first pay attention to the repeated part, 'I lock my door . . . and bar them out,' and then take notice of the new information 'upon myself.' Including the most repetitive word 'myself' as a main theme, moreover, the part 'upon myself' sounds impressive to the readers' ear. Therefore, the title of the painting by Khnopff is not 'I lock my door' nor 'I lock my door and

bar them out' but 'I lock my door *upon myself*' (my emphasis).

Khnopff's other painting, named after the title of the original poem, *Who Shall Deliver Me?* (1891: figure 2), seems to reflect the emphasis on the psyche of the speaker 'myself.' A close-up of a young woman's bust occupies the space. A street of a dead town is showing behind her. A few fallen leaves are twined around her hair. Her eyes are looking at something in the air or reflecting her empty feelings. Here Khnopff tries to depict the atmosphere of emptiness or vacancy that the speaker 'myself' creates in the original poem. The look of the woman against the background reminds us of the second stanza of the poem:

> All others are outside myself;
> I lock my door and bar them out,
> The turmoil, tedium, gad-about.
> (4-6)

Instead of surveying the original poem and its relevance to the painting, Howe introduces this painting briefly in his book. He regards *I lock my door upon myself* as a 'more personal, more fully developed statement than *Who Shall Deliver Me?* (1891), which also illustrates Christina Rossetti's poem.' (106). As he says, *Who Shall Deliver Me?* is only an illustration of the original poem. On the other hand, *I lock my door upon myself* is not a mere illustration but 'a matrix of symbolic associations' (105) which embody Christina's internal world in 'Who Shall Deliver Me?'

With these issues in mind, we will now take a look at the composition of the painting *I lock my door upon myself* (1891: figure 3). As pointed out at the beginning of this section, there is no 'pictorial' element in the original poem. Why was Khnopff inspired by the poem? How did he depict the world of Christina Rossetti's poetry? How is the poem pictorialised?

A woman with vacant eyes rests her elbows on a black thing at the centre of a room. This woman must be the speaker of the original poem 'Who Shall Deliver Me?' As the subtitle of the painting 'Christina Georgina Rossetti' proves, Khnopff identifies the speaker as Christina herself. When Khnopff met Christina in England in 1991, she was already over sixty. It is hard to suppose that he portrayed her as she was at that time. The woman in the painting is one of the typical Pre-Raphaelite women, as Howe calls her 'a melancholic Pre-Raphaelite beauty with red hair and penetrating eyes' (105). Dante Gabriel's *The Blessed Damozel* (1875-79: figure 4) shows greater affinities to the woman than the Virgin Mary of Dante Gabriel's famous *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848: figure 5) and of *Ecce Ancilla Domini* (1850: figure 6). As is well known, Christina modelled for these two paintings, in which she is 'predominantly pictured as angelic, virginal, saintly. . . . the sexless feminine ideal' (Chapman 147).

The three orange lilies are to be explained. The number 'three' might be interpreted as having various meanings; however, as is seen in the case of the 'three' watchers, or the triplets of the original poem, it might only symbolise 'completeness' in the Christian sense. As for the orange of the lilies, Robert Develoy, a French art critic, states that orange symbolises desire, which was a prevailing colour in the late nineteenth century (72). Khnopff changes the colour of the lilies from Dante Gabriel's pure white to his sensuous orange, and suggests that the woman is no longer the incarnation of the Virgin Mary but a human being who 'craves for ease, and rest, and joys.' The orange stands out as well as the blue of the wing.

The statue of Hypnos, the god of sleep and death, with a blue wing is an avatar of Christina's obsessive theme of 'sleep = death.' The blue colour of the wing symbolises the aspiration for death, for the kingdom of God, because the colour generally symbolises heaven and eternity, while the wing symbolises active aspiration. The wing of Hypnos indicates the central division of the wall, seemingly a locked door. Therefore the central division or door is suggestive of the entrance of the world of death, the entrance to eternal sleep and dream.

There are still different interpretations for the black-covered object on which the woman is leaning. Howe introduces some of them, such as 'a table or coffin' or 'a grand piano' or 'simply [. . .] a table' (106). All of these interpretations are possible. If it could be interpreted to be a coffin, the object would be symbolic of death, the central theme of the original poem. This interpretation is the most persuasive if we compare the poem and the painting. To liken poetry to music, the piano would be an instrument for composing a musical piece. The important thing in any interpretation is that her

creativity is covered with a black cloth. The cloth is hanging over just around her elbows, which expresses the fact that she tries to cover up or even conceal her power of creativity, but fails to cover it all up. The condition of the cloth is applied to her own situation: she cannot manage her feelings towards 'myself' yet cannot abandon herself. Namely it is not a table nor a piano but 'myself' that is covered with a black cloth. The conflict between 'me' and 'myself,' the struggle between her loyalty to God and her human desire is a kind of creativity to dramatise her poetry. Khnopff expresses 'myself' as an intriguing object which spreads horizontally all over the scene. The woman 'I' covers the object with a black cloth to conceal it from her view, but the irrational and absurd existence of 'myself' is too influential for her to escape from. She covers the creativity, possibilities, and resources of her work, and has withdrawn into her interior to stay alone and will not open her heart to anyone.

The wall of the room is divided into some complicated phases, and characterised as a plane. The planeness of the wall cooperates with the distance from the foreground prop to the scenery outside the window via the woman, and enhances a multiplier effect in intensifying the closeness of the place where the woman stays. As a room is a symbol of a human heart in general, the closeness of the room implies the mental closeness of the woman, and suggests her retirement from the social world. The right phase of the wall seems a window showing a desolate city.

The woman turns her back from the window and keeps her distance from it, but the open window offers escape in the same way as the one in *The Watchers*. There seems a black shadow of a ghost-like being standing on the street in a desolate city. She also turns her back on the Hypnos statue, looking over the front line of orange lilies with vacant eyes. Yet the distance between the blue wing of the statue and her is shorter than that between the woman and the orange lilies. She is ready to escape from this weary world through the door to the kingdom of God. This is proved by the fact that her look is similar to that of Hypnos. Over the locked door, suggesting her door to lock upon herself ('I lock my door upon myself'), there may be spreading the same scenery as we could see through the open window.

The woman and the lily, the woman and the statue of Hypnos — these two sets produce a delicate balance into the centre of the scene, and seem to draw in the air an isosceles triangle whose top is on the woman. Just the word 'Death' is placed in the centre of the original poem and keeps a balance there, as the three elements united by death — the woman, the lily, the blue Hypnos statue — never invade other's territory and project the motif of the poem in the painting.

By contrast with 'The Watchers,' it is hard to find any 'pictorial' elements directly in such a non-pictorial poem as 'Who Shall Deliver Me?' However, rejecting any attempt at reproducing blindly the pictorial quality of the original poem, Richmond is somehow independent of it, and produces his own room with an open window while keeping the theme of 'sleep = death' and emphasising the closeness. At the same time, he recreated the expanse of the death world through the open window as escape. On the other hand, using the symbolic objects in *I lock my door upon myself*, Khnopff expresses the images inspired by the main theme of the original poem. The Hypnos statue is an avatar of 'sleep = death.' The scene of a desolate city through the open window leads to the world of death, and the black ghost-like shadow on the street intensifies the shadow of death. The closeness of the room identifies the theme of confinement and conflict between me and myself, and the independent triplet stanza of the original poem, basically similar to the couplet of 'The Watchers' in that respect. Khnopff uses the Hypnos's blue wing to suggest the aspiration for the escape of death from the closed room through the open window, and through the door if she unlocks it, which would lead her to the hall of death. Just as Richmond has painted a room in order to describe the closeness or confinement of 'sleep = death' and reproduced the expanse of the death world through the open window as the middle angel invites escape, so Khnopff has pictorialised the closeness of the original poem and recreated the aspiration for death as flight with the blue wing of Hypnos, by painting a room with an open window in his Symbolist way.

Conclusion

Thus, the pictorialisability (the possibility of picto-

rialisation) of these cases is not necessarily dependent on the pictorial elements of the original poem. Through the investigation of the relevance between the original poems and the paintings, two important features of Christina's poetry have been observed: the theme of 'sleep = death'; her habit of 'repetition.' Throughout her poetry the theme of 'sleep = death' is repetitive or rather obsessive, and the repetition is the most familiar technique whose effect often supports a thematic tension, or even a climax in the text. The repetitive theme and word (or sound) enable the power of words to stimulate the Symbolist painters' imagination. Even such a non-pictorial poem as 'Who Shall Deliver Me?' captured Khnopff by the network of words, and inspired him to depict the images that are interwoven into a manifestation of Khnopff's personal world which originates from Christina's poem and develops into correspondence to her closed interior as well as to her obsessive theme of 'sleep = death.'

The closeness of the grave and the aspiration for death as sleep: these elements of the original poems emerged as inspiration in these painters' minds. The closeness identifies the individual and independent stanza of the original poems such as couplet or triplet. The autumnal atmosphere of 'The Watchers' surrounds the confinement of sleep = death, and the meditation on death (= sleep) as salvation from the conflict between 'me' and 'myself' in 'Who Shall Deliver Me?': both elements are pictorialised by each Symbolist painter.

In other words, it is these two elements, not the pictorial quality, that characterise Christina's devotional poetry most and have inspired her contemporary painters to pictorialise her poetic world not in illustrations but in paintings: one is the theme of closeness in this world and confinement in the body, including the conflict with such constraint; the other is that of aspiration for the world of sleep = death as temporal and spatial release from mortality to eternity.

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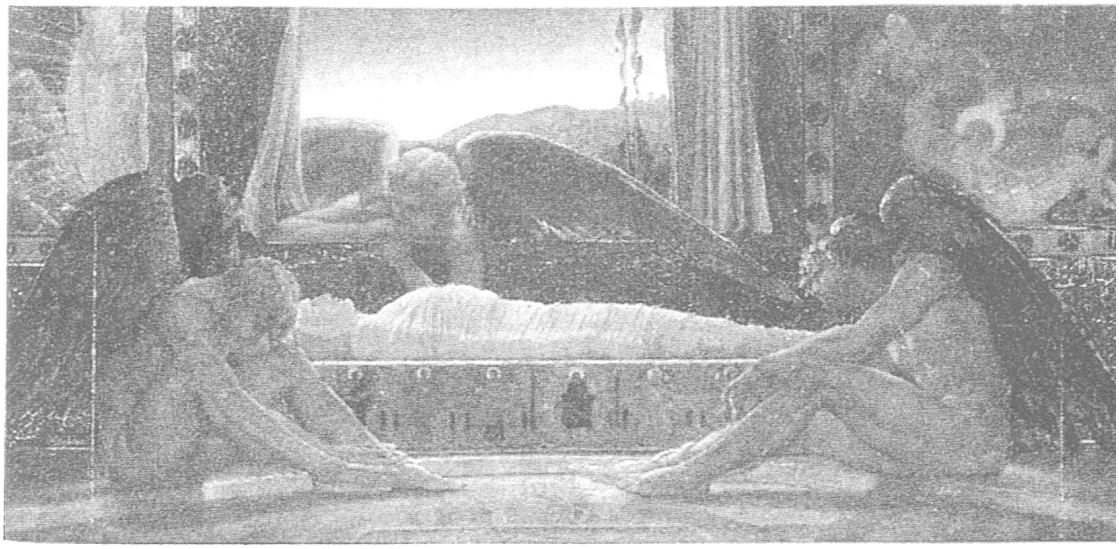

Figure 1 Willam Blake Richmond *The Watchers* (1873-76)

Figure 2 Fernad Khnopff *Who shall Deliver Me ?* (1891)

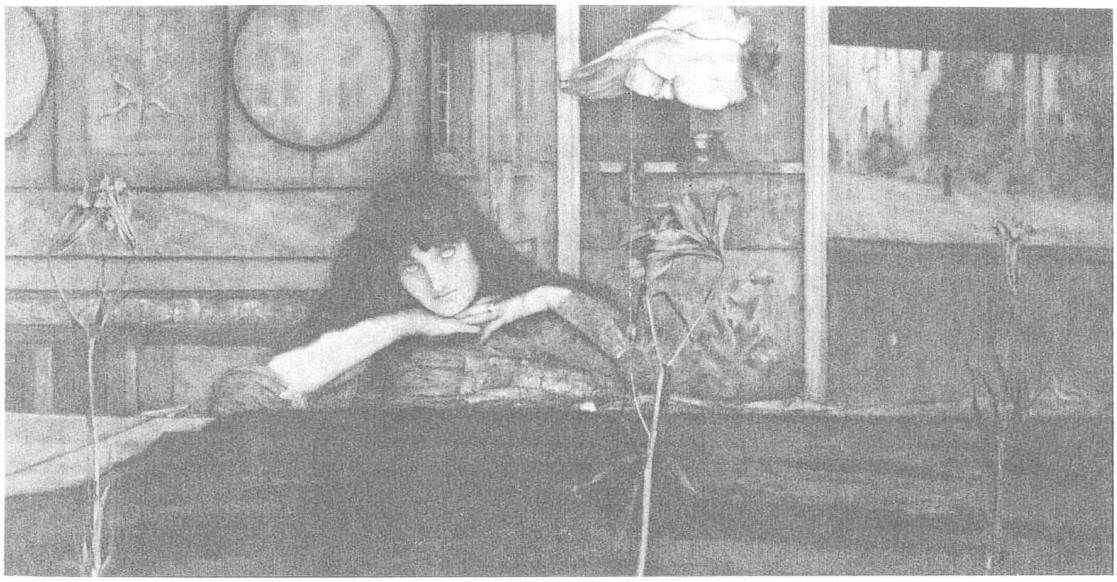

Figure 3 Fernad Khnopff *I lock door upon myself* (1891)

Figure 4　Dante Gabriel Rossetti *The Blessd Damozel*（1875-78）

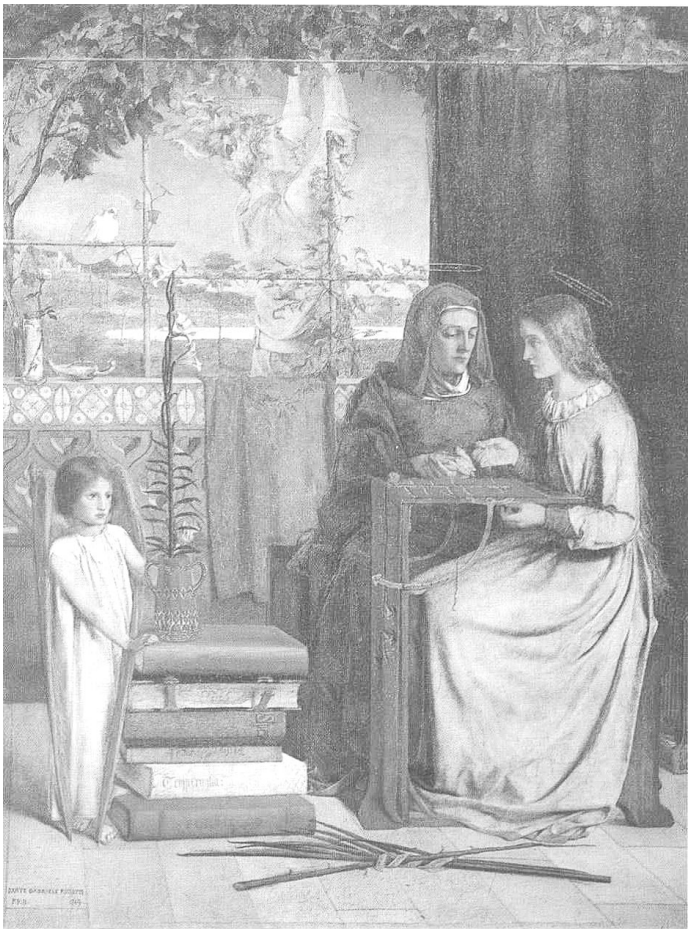

Figure 5　Dante Gabriel Rossetti
The Girlhood of Mary Virgin（1848）

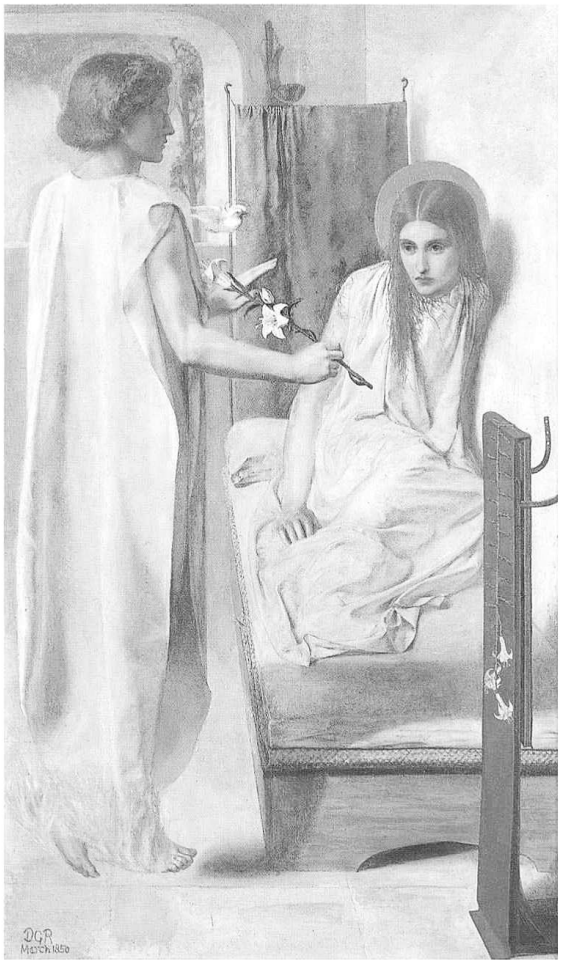

Figure 6　Dante Gabriel Rossetti
Ecce Ancilla Domini（1850）