

# The Narrative Voices of Female Wanderers: Narrative Strategy in the Poems and Lyrics of Christina Rossetti

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## Introduction

The narrative structure in the poems and lyrics of Christina Rossetti (1830-1894) has so far been studied within the context of feminism. While many feminist critiques have focused on the reserve or the renunciation of each protagonist seen in her poems, most of their studies have often been concentrated on the repressed female figure within the patriarchal society in the nineteenth-century Victorian Britain. However, with analyzing the narrative of each female protagonist of Christina Rossetti's poems, one may recognize that the speaker often states on or makes comments about her situation as much as she can and expresses her inner-self even under the reserve or the renunciation. Expressing themselves over the reserve and the renunciation makes the narrative of each protagonist as one more real and explicit. The purpose of this paper is to reexamine the narrative structure of Christina Rossetti's poems and lyrics by analyzing the narrative voices of the female protagonists, especially those of female wanderers who were recognized as being vulnerable in society. In reexamining the narrative structure of female wanderers, the poet's interest in the social problems and participation in the volunteer work in order to help "fallen women", who lost their place to live on after getting ousted from the society should also be considered.

## I. Writing Poems and Doing Volunteer Works

### i. A Poet's Voice and the Voice in the Poems

Christina Rossetti, a poet of Victorian Britain, devoted most of her

life in composing poems as well as working within her domestic circle including her home and the Christian community. Both her secular and religious poems and verses were written within the environment of her domesticity. Reading and studying with her mother, Francis and her siblings helped her develop her literary achievement. Although she was never accepted as a regular member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood of which her brother Dante Gabriel was a propitious member, it was Christina Rossetti who finally outlived of her brother as a lifelong poet of the nineteenth-century Britain from the time she had been keeping from neither too close nor too distant relation with the Brotherhood. While the characteristics of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood lie in its brilliant and colourful depictions compared to medieval miniatures or paintings, various and elaborate narrative voices enough to evoke pictorial depiction are seen in the poems of Christina Rossetti. What should be examined first is the narrative voices of hers with focusing on each of their narrative structures.

The narrative structure in the poems of Christina Rossetti has often been examined by feminist critiques. As to the studying of her poems, the reserve and the renunciation with which female protagonists speak themselves while the poet's own voice being put onto their narratives have often been discussed so far. Gilbert and Gubar argue that "for the woman poet, only renunciation, or even anguish, can be a suitable source of song."<sup>(1)</sup> Making emphasis that the poet-protagonist of Christina Rossetti often chooses to be mute or even die in order to be free from any restraint, Dolores Rosenblum states that "[f]or the nineteenth-century women poets, . . . the passively enduring female figure is not simply a symbol for shared inner experience. It also stands for female experience within patriarchal culture [,]"<sup>(2)</sup> and refers to "what the male poet may feel and symbolize as female in his art, the female poet enacts — or endures both in life and in art[,]"<sup>(3)</sup> and continues as follows:

For the nineteenth-century woman poet, the poetry of endurance becomes a strategy for dealing with the most extreme kind of self-division, a division forced . . . by a particular symbolic system and by

particular cultural attitudes.<sup>(4)</sup>

In examining the narrative voices of Christina Rossetti's poems, especially those of the first person, what should be made clear is that the voice of the poet and that of the protagonist may be correlated but not always completely equal nor different from each other. The poet projects her voice to the voice of the protagonist and the voice of the protagonist can be interpreted as the "detached" voice in the poem. As to the analysis of the narrative voices of the poems, the study should be done on the basis of the idea that the poet's voice is just projected on the narrative of protagonist's or the voice of each protagonist is the projection of the poet's voice but the voice is "detached" from that of the poet within the narratives at the same time. The studies should be done on this assumption of the correlation between the poet and the protagonist.

One of the typical renunciation or the poetic reserve can be seen in one of Rossetti's earlier poems, "Song" which was composed in 1848.<sup>(5)</sup> The speaker of the first person of "Song" is getting choked back and then mute while reflecting on the past:

She sat and sang alway  
By the green margin of a stream,  
Watching the fishes leap and play  
Beneath the glad sunbeam. (1-4)<sup>(6)</sup>

The song begins with the reference to "she" who kept on singing while the first person speaker is mute or does not give any words. The first stanza is regarded as the song of "she" while the speaker is behind the screen. Even in the second and the third stanza, the speaker refrains from making any statements of the present situation while just reflecting on the past. With the reflecting on the past, the presence of "I" is intertwined with "she".

I sat and wept alway  
Beneath the moon's most shadowy beam,  
Watching the blossoms of the May  
Weep leaves into the stream.

I wept for memory;  
 She sang for hope that is so fair:  
 My tears were swallowed by the sea;  
 Her songs died on the air. (5-12)

In the final stanza, the speaker takes turns referring to the self and “she” whose actual presence seems to have been lost. While “she” sang her song, the words of the speaker were being lost and even that song finally disappears with the choking of the speaker. This interlaced relations of two reserved protagonists are regarded as correlatives and what consists of the correlatives are the ambiguous position of both protagonists. The position or the identity of both “I” and “she” remain unclear in this song, and the reason of singing or weeping is blurred to the last under the ambiguity of the protagonists who are referred to only with pronouns. There lies the ambiguity in this song, and this ambiguous position of the protagonists should result from as well as result in the poetic renunciation. By taking the ambiguous position, the speaker is able to hide her real self behind the screen and it can be understood that the renunciation seen in Christina Rossetti’s poems and lyrics may also function as the protagonist’s protecting or defending the unstable or vulnerable self. As to the position of the female protagonists, the unstable position of women which lies under the reserved self is examined in the next paragraphs.

## ii . “Fallen Women” and the Female Wanderers

The position of women in Victorian era is indicated in relation with the ideal of the patriarchal society. According to McCord and Purdue, “[t]he ideal of the comfortable home as a retreat and a pocket of stability was attractive as was the associated notion of womanhood separate from the working world and supposedly oblivious to the roughness, unpleasantness, and immorality of much of the life of Victorian towns.”<sup>(7)</sup> It is too obvious that the ideal of women in Victorian era was always linked with female domesticity, so McCord and Purdue continue as

follows:

The image of the ideal woman presiding over the ideal home was one which only the comfortably off could approximate to [,] . . . It was powerfully reinforced by art and literature as *was its obverse, 'the fallen woman'*.<sup>(8)</sup> ( my italics )

It is well known that Christina Rossetti and other female members of the Rossetti family and the relatives devoted their time in doing some volunteer work within the religious community. It was Rossetti's devotion to Anglo-Catholicism inspired by the Oxford Movement that encouraged her education and working voluntary within this female community.<sup>(9)</sup> Mary Arseneau states that "through her own volunteer work and that of her sister and aunts, Rossetti had close personal connections to important sites of nineteenth-century women's emancipation from the domestic sphere."<sup>(10)</sup> In Rossetti's case, much of her time spent within the female family members and relatives may have been both the "emancipation" from home and the "extension" of home, and her working as "[a] volunteer at St Mary Magdalen Home for Fallen Women in Highgate Hill (until 1865?)"<sup>(11)</sup> has often been regarded as a religious activity helping as well as saving those fallen women. Women who were under poverty and very unstable positions were vulnerable and getting threatened under the evil of society and as to the society involving those women, Liza Picard states as follows:

Prostitution was the Great Social Evil, a subject that both fascinated and repelled the Victorian middle class. Ladies were supposed not to know about it, gentlemen only knew the theory, not, of course, the practice.<sup>(12)</sup>

Those who had "fallen" and been ousted from the society had finally nowhere to go, and it is highly likely that Rossetti's interest as well as her concern about the social problem culminated when working voluntary at Highgate. The theme of fallen women in Rossetti's poems is actually related with the theme of the female wanderers, being ousted from the society, so that the narrative structure of the female protagonists should be examined focusing on the wanderers.

The narrative structure of Christina Rossetti's poems is related with her strategy as a poet either. As to the poetic stance of Christina Rossetti, Rosenblum points out that "[t]hematically, much of her poetry deals with the sense of having no place to live and write from: belonging nowhere, neither with the artists nor with the women[.]"<sup>(13)</sup> and emphasizes the complicated identity of the poet.

[H]er poems attempt to deal with the fact that a woman artist finds herself to be both artist and model, both subject and object, both male and female — both, or perhaps neither, and therefore nothing at all.<sup>(14)</sup>

As has already been discussed, Christina Rossetti's narrative strategy lies in the correlatives between the poet and the protagonist, and her strategy as a poet reveals the "reserved" structure of the poems embedded within the patriarchal society. Susan Conley, another critique of Christina Rossetti's states that "[m]any of Rossetti's poems can be read as counter-discursive, working within the ideological, gender marked language of Victorian poetic discourse in such a way as to destabilize it[.]"<sup>(15)</sup> and this indicates that Rossetti's poems should be read within the context of patriarchal society while they contain the elements of making that context rather unstable. As a poetic strategy on the theme of the female wanderer, "The Ruined Cross" is examined.

"The Ruined Cross", the narrative poem composed in 1846 shows Rossetti's earlier interest and concern in the problem of fallen women or female wanderers. Losing the place to stay in, the protagonist of the poem begins her journey.

She wreathed bright flower-wreaths in her hair,  
 And all men smiled as she passed by:  
 And she smiled too, for now she knew  
 That her last hour was nigh.

Soft radiance shone upon her path,  
 Her steps was fearless, free and light;  
 Her cheek was flushed with burning red,

Her azure eye was bright.

On, on, still on, she hurried on,  
For in the wind she heard a knell,  
And to her ear the water's splash  
Was as a dying bell. (1-12)

The poem is narrated by the third person, and the protagonist does not utter any of her own words, and her position is indicated with the happenings surrounding her. The protagonist is depicted as the woman who is attractive to men, but it is clear that her journey is toward the journey to death. The flushing of her cheek and the eyes brightening indicate the decline of her health. When the last time is approaching, the protagonist's position is ironically free from any restraint, but she remains calm. She continues her last journey while her decline is implied with the depiction of natural surroundings:

And in the flowers she saw decay,  
And saw decay in every tree;  
And change was written on the sun,  
And change upon the sea. (13-16)

The change or decay in natural things surrounding her function as correlatives of the declining of the protagonist's health. The referring to only her decline in the first part of the poem indicates the reserved strategy of the poet either. The real purpose of her journey is shown at the latter part of this poem:

The sun arose, the sun went down,  
The moonbeams on the waters shone  
How many times! yet paused she not,  
But ever journeyed on

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At length, she reached a lonely spot, . . .  
Why trembled she? why turned she pale?  
A ruined Cross stood in the midst

Of a most quiet vale.

A Cross o'ergrown with moss and flowers,  
 A cross fast sinking to decay;  
 The Cross she knew, the Cross she loved  
 In childhood's happy day.

And she had journeyed many miles,  
 Morning and eve untiringly,  
 To look again upon that Cross,  
 To look again and die. (21-40)

The protagonist has kept on her journey to go back and look upon the Cross, which is associated with her innocent childhood. Her journey was not just going back to the Cross but going back to her past; the time when she was loved and spent her days with freedom and innocence. Her journey is, so to speak, going back to her lost childhood. Her last time is spent by the shade of the Cross:

And there she knelt, and there she prayed  
 Until her heart was satisfied; —  
 The ancient Cross is standing yet,  
 The youthful wanderer died. (45-48)

The protagonist dies after having achieved her purpose of looking upon the Cross and kneeling and praying there, so her journey should be interpreted as a pilgrimage and the death of the protagonist can be finally regarded as a martyrdom. With her journey depicted as a pilgrimage, this female wanderer is finally saved by dying as a young pilgrim. Rossetti's early interest in fallen women is closely related with her religious faith and the poet's strategy of keeping reserve is well recognized in "The Ruined Cross".

## II. The Narrative of Female Wanderers

### i. The Extreme Reserve

The theme of the reserve is also seen in a sonnet, "From Sunset to

Star Rise” that was composed in 1865.<sup>(16)</sup> While the protagonist of “The Ruined Cross” does not utter any words of herself, the protagonist of “From Sunset to Star Rise” narrates her own life that has been lost and devastated. She calls for her former friends to stay away from her while referring to her plights and accusing herself:

Go from me, summer friends, and tarry not:  
I am no summer friend, but wintry cold,  
A silly sheep benighted from the fold,  
A sluggard with a thorn-choked garden plot.  
Take counsel, sever from my lot your lot,  
Dwell in your pleasant places, hoard your gold;  
Lest you with me should shiver on the wold,  
Athirst and hungering on a barren spot.  
For I have hedged me with a thorny hedge,  
I live alone, I look to die alone:  
Yet sometimes when a wind sighs through the sedge  
Ghosts of my buried years and friends come back,  
My heart goes sighing after swallows flown  
On sometime summer’s unreturning track. (1-14)

Calling herself “[a] silly sheep” (3) or “[a] sluggard” (4), the protagonist-speaker blames her “fallen” state on herself. Her statement clearly shows she is accusing herself and declining any help of her former friends while asking for staying away from her even though she is suffering from the plight. This means that the protagonist accepts the circumstances falling on her and she believes she deserves the “punishment” of being ousted from the society. This attitude shows her extreme reserve and it will lead her wish of dying after being left completely alone. Her narrative also suggests that she believes any “good friends” would be saved only if she leaves from them and dies as a result of her conducts. The protagonist’s recognition that she deserves her own plight and degradation and her attitude of even accepting dying alone indicate her belief of keeping extreme reserve which would be the only way left for her.

Christina Rossetti's depiction of female wanderers reveals another side of her strategy as a poet. By depicting female wanderers in her poems, she indirectly criticizes or shows her skepticism of the patriarchal society under which the woman once ousted from the society cannot help but keep the extreme reserve or blame herself while they have no place to go. The protagonists as female wanderers actually get stuck or in limbo as well by wandering alone after losing the place to go. They can find no solution nor place to go to while keeping their extreme reserve, so they are "trapped" or "bound" within the harshness resulted from the patriarchal society.

## ii . Breaking the Reserve

In depicting the wanderings of the female protagonists in her poems, Christina Rossetti indirectly condemns or at least criticizes the society which makes women wander and suffer once ousted from the community. By suggesting the final death of the protagonists in poems, however, Rossetti seems to come to terms with the norm that only death could be the solution for women sufferers just as Susan Conley says that "death as an escape from life that is enigmatically unsatisfactory[.]"<sup>(17)</sup> The voice of female protagonists are turned into silence by death, so to say, but as has been shown before, the female protagonists are in limbo while they are kept in wandering. So they are still having their words to speak in life before death. What is analyzed in this chapter should be the protagonist's words uttered while she stays in limbo which are recognized as the breaking of the reserve.

In examining the breaking of the reserve, "The Dream" composed in 1851 should be analyzed. The protagonist of this poem begins her story by looking back on the past, and her standpoint is mainly suggested by the relation with her former love. The poem begins with the words equivalent to the poetic invocation:

Rest, rest; the troubled breast  
 Panteth evermore for rest: ——  
 Be it sleep, or be it death,

Rest is all it coveteth. (1-4)

The first stanza functions as the invocation and the protagonist's calling for her former love follows her narratives. In analyzing the relationship between the protagonist and her former love, the change of the use of pronouns should be noticed.

In "The Dream", the protagonist does not speak anything particular about her "wandering", which actually might be regarded as her psychological wandering as well as the one of literal or physical. The protagonist starts calling for her former love with the second person.

Tell me, dost *thou* remember the old time  
*We* sat together by that sunny stream,  
And dreamed our happiness was too sublime  
Only to be a dream? (5-8, my italics)

The archaic form of the second person "thou" suggests their intimacy and the sudden switch to the first person plural "we" shows the strengthening of the ties between them. Once "I" and "thou" are referred to as "we", they cannot be separated easily. The protagonist continues to reflect on the time when she spent together with him and gets back to the present:

And now that *thou* art gone, I often sit  
On its green margin, for *thou* once went there;  
And see the clouds that, floating over it,  
Darken the quiet air.

Yes, oftentimes I sit beside it now,  
Harkening the wavelets ripple o'er the sands;  
Until again I hear *thy* whispered vow  
And feel *thy* pressing hands. (17-24, my italics)

While she is calling him with the second person, she feels his presence, but that is actually lost, and there happens the first crack of her reserve. Her reserve is finally broken in the latter stanza of the poem:

I say: "It is a joy-dream; I will take it;  
*He* is not gone; *he* will return to me."

What found'st *thou* in my heart that *thou* should'st break  
it? ———

How have I injured *thee*? (29-32, my italics)

The stanza begins with the direct speech of the protagonist. By calling her former love with the third person “he” she clearly makes the distance between herself and the former love while still convincing herself of his coming back to her. The use of the third person in the direct speech may also indicate the protagonist’s trying to objectify the situation. The attitude of the protagonist here shows that she is trying to draw the line between the past and the present and depict the situation as objective as she can but has not yet achieved any of them. So the calling by the third person quickly changes to the second person and there breaks her reserve when it has reached the limit. The breaking of the reserve is triggered by the stranded position of the protagonist for she has no place to go forward nor backward.

By breaking her reserve, the protagonist turns to the accusation of herself but it is not only of herself but of the circumstances that have driven her to the present situation.

Oh! I am weary of life's passing show, ——  
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I would I could lie down lone in my woe,  
    Ne'er to rise up again;  
I would I could lie down where none might know;  
    For truly love is vain.  
Truly love's vain; but oh! how vainer still  
    Is that which is not love, but seems;  
Concealed indifference, a covered ill,  
    A very dream of dreams. (33-42)

What is noticeable in the last stanza is that while trying to regard the past event as a “dream”, which is anything but not real, the protagonist rather captures the harsh present as the reality. She deplores the present situation but not wishes for or waits for the coming of death. Facing the reality caused by the past event makes her both wander as

well as stranded. Furthermore, by narrating the harsh circumstances brought about her while facing them brings about the uncanny emancipation of the protagonist. The reserve which was finally broken led to the self-emancipation of the female protagonist.

### III. Wandering, Narrating, and Reflecting on Herself

i. Back to the Reserve and Discretion

In "The Dream", the breaking of the reserve is accompanied with the protagonist's uncanny self-emancipation, and this not-complete emancipation reveals her ambiguous position as the protagonist, for by not fully expressing her plight or devastation, she remains under the system of the patriarchal society. In this last chapter, the ambiguous position of female protagonist is studied in order to show the poetic strategy of Christina Rossetti.

"An Apple Gathering" (1857) is the poem of gathering of the apples at harvest time and the protagonist's failure of picking any. The event happened to the protagonist is told chronologically:

I plucked pink blossoms from mine apple tree  
And wore them all that evening in my hair:  
Then in due season when I went to see  
I found no apples there. (1-4)

As to the plucking of the blossoms and finding no apples in the harvest season, the protagonist does not directly refer to its cause and effect, but only indicates the facts. There lies the implication of what happened to her in the past. Her loneliness intensifies after she is left alone reflecting on the past while the neighbours go around and pass her by:

Plump Gertrude passed me with her basket full,  
A stronger hand than hers helped it along;  
A voice talked with her thro' the shadows cool  
More sweet to me than song.

Ah Willie, Willie, was my love less worth  
Than apples with their green leaves piled above?

I counted rosiest apples on the earth  
 Of far less worth than love. (13-20)

While her former love and the neighbours are called by his/her name, the anonymity of the protagonist contrastingly makes her position and identity ambiguous and unstable. There is also an implication that the man walking beside Gertrude is the protagonist's former love, shown by only the circumstances that the figure might be his. With her anonymity and ambiguous as well as unstable position, her words seem just to be deploring the unrequited love, but the final stanza shows the fact that the protagonist has actually "fallen".

So once it was with me you stooped to talk  
 Laughing and listening in this very lane:  
 To think that by this way we used to walk  
 We shall not walk again!

I let my neighbours pass me, ones and twos  
 And groups; the latest said the night grew chill,  
 And hastened: but I loitered, while the dews  
 Fell fast I loitered still. (21-28)

What is indicated here is that the speaker has lost her love and fallen, while her neighbours or acquaintances no longer pay any attention to her. The protagonist being forced to loiter or wander even after the sunset and the chilly evening clearly shows that she is ousted from the community. While she suffers from being ostracized, the neighbours continue their ordinary lives. It should be said that the stability of the community is protected as long as they continue to oust any person whose behavior was recognized as wrong and unsuitable to them just like the protagonist's. In "An Apple Gathering", the protagonist's remaining loitering alone shows that she is under the "forced reserve", so to speak. Under the cover of this discretion, the protagonist reveals the harsh reality caused by the traditional system of community on which base deeply lies the patriarchal society.

The oppressive system is also seen in Rossetti's nursery-rhyme, *Sing-*

*Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book* published in 1872. It is well known that Arthur Hughes, one of the members of the former Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood made illustration for those rhymes. One of the songs, “Crying my little one, footsore and weary?” is the song by the mother to her infant. As the illustration of Arthur Hughes shows, the protagonist-singer is the mother wandering under the snowstorm with her child on her arms:

Crying, my little one, footsore and weary?  
Fall asleep, pretty one, warm on my shoulder:  
*I must tramp on through the winter night dreary,*  
While the snow falls on me colder and colder.

You are my one, and I have not another;  
Sleep soft, my darling, *my trouble and treasure*;  
Sleep warm and soft in the arms of your mother,  
Dreaming of pretty things, dreaming of pleasure.<sup>(18)</sup>

(1-8, my italics)

The song intensifies the harsher reality the mother faces when being left alone with her infant. Lorraine Janzen Kooistra states that “[t]here is also the possibility that she may be one of the many Victorian ‘fallen women’ who were turned out of their homes with their illegitimate children.”<sup>(19)</sup> Though the possibility that the child is illegitimate is implied in the mother’s words, “my trouble and treasure” (6), Kooistra rather puts more emphasis on the love of the mother saying that “what comes through in image and text is the overwhelming love of the mother for her child and the guarantee that whatever the inclement temporal situation—in either the social or the natural world—the bond between mother and child is strong enough to overcome all barriers [.]”<sup>(20)</sup> While it’s true that the child is protected under the mother’s care, the child’s safety depends on only the mother who has been ousted from the social stability and safety, so that they are both under threat once they are getting forced out of the community. What this song reveals is that even love or the bond between the mother and the child are under threat

once ostracized from the society, and it is rather the social “stability” that is “protected” by those being vulnerable getting forced out as wanderers. By depicting the wandering mother and child under the cover of the love and bond, Christina Rossetti unveiled another harsh reality of the patriarchal society while remaining or being kept under that system.

ii . Under the Shade of “Protection” and “Self-Reflection”

The reserve or the renunciation seen in Christina Rossetti’s poems should cause the discretion of the female protagonists whose vulnerable position puts them getting oppressed in the patriarchal society. In a monologue seen in “In the Willow Shade” (circa. 1872) , the reserve of the protagonist finally turns into the discretion but shows self-reflection of herself. The protagonist is in an ambiguous position while she keeps pondering, and this position of hers should be analyzed in relation with the narrative structure. The monologue begins with the pondering of the protagonist:

I sat beneath a willow tree,  
Where water falls and calls;  
While fancies upon fancies solaced me,  
Some true, and some were false. (1-4)

The position of the protagonist is actually blurred and remains ambiguous, and even the gender of the protagonist is not definitely indicated here. The protagonist- speaker cannot help but ponder her situation by asking herself without getting any solution or response. The narrative is rather that of monotone than those by other wanderer-protagonists.

All things are vain that wax and wane,  
For which we waste our breath;  
Love only doth not wane and is not vain,  
Love only outlives death. (13-16)

Unlike other female wanderers, the protagonist of “In the Willow Shade” does not accuse of herself nor deplore her plight but just refers

to the vanity of life and seeks for the attainment of Love (the god's love) after death. Lone and loitering, she asks questions to the natural surroundings: first, the singing lark, and next to the weeping willow:

A singing lark rose toward the sky,  
Circling he sang amain;  
He sang, a speck scarce visible sky-high,  
And then he sank again.

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A hovering melody of birds  
Haunted the air above;  
They clearly *sang contentment without words*,  
And youth and joy and love. (17-28, my italics)

While referring to the singing lark, the protagonist compares its song to that of hers. The singing of the lark has no words but the bird sounds expressing its joy of living freely. Whereas the protagonist is under the discretion, she has her own words to express herself. She continues to refer to the weeping willow and her narrative turns to the reflection of herself:

O silvery weeping willow tree  
With all leaves shivering,  
Have you no purpose but to shadow me  
Beside this rippled spring?

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Have you no purpose in the world  
But thus to shadow me  
With all your tender drooping twigs unfurled,  
O weeping willow tree? (29-44)

The protagonist repeatedly asks questions to the willow tree without getting any response. The willow tree remains mute but it is just the

thing which “protects” or “hides” the protagonist from the harsh world by shadowing her with its own shade. The protagonist’s making her monologue while getting no response intensifies her loneliness but it also indicates that she reflects on herself about the reason of living now that she is loitering as a wanderer. Her monologue shows her recognition of completely being alone but the willow gives shades for her to keep on wondering / wandering:

Slow wind sighed thro’ the willow leaves,  
 The ripple made a moan,  
 The world dropped murmuring like a thing that grieves;  
 And then I felt alone.

I rose to go, and felt the chill,  
 And shivered as I went,  
 Yet shivering wondered, and I wonder still,  
 What more that willow meant;

That silvery weeping willow tree  
 With all leaves shivering,  
 Which spent one long day overshadowing me  
 Beside a spring in Spring. (61-72)

The natural surroundings just “sigh” or “moan” and no words are uttered here towards them by the protagonist but she is given the place to ponder and reflect on herself while wandering and pausing for moments even while shivering herself. Wandering around the natural surroundings is linked with her wondering of the meaning of life. The protagonist’s wandering / wondering is actually reflected on or expressed with the natural surroundings, while she does not deplore nor make any personal statement about herself, so they function as the correlatives of the protagonist’s discretion and reserve. What is also noticeable is the fact that the protagonist of “In the Willow Shade” does not wish death nor getting “free” after death, but is forced to keep on living with just wandering / wondering. Her life has been in monotone

of wandering and pondering and always in limbo, so to say, under the shade or by the shadow correlated with the reserved self. As to the monotone depicted in arts, John Ruskin makes a comment in his work, "The Nature of Gothic" (1853) as follows:

. . . [M]onotony in certain measure . . . above all, that *transparent* monotony, which, like the shadow of a great painter, suffers all manner of dimly suggested form to be seen through the body of it, is an essential in architectural as in all other composition; and the endurance of monotony has about the same place in a healthy mind that the endurance of darkness has[.]<sup>(21)</sup>

If "the endurance of monotony" should be adapted to the poetic depiction of Christina Rossetti, that can be read as her poetic characteristics of "the reserve and discretion" which have kept female protagonists stay within and speak about themselves in uncanny position. Keeping position of the endurance itself might be seen in literary works as they have to describe both light and darkness or positive and negative side of life and humanity. However, female protagonists under monotonic discretion suffer from living on as well as being left alone even after asking for or pondering on monotonous questions. The female wanderers in Christina Rossetti's poems narrating with discretion under their uncanny position reveal the more uncanny aspect of the patriarchal society in Victorian era.

### Conclusion

Studying Christina Rossetti's poems by focusing on the narrative structures of female wanderers has shown the oppressive side of Victorian patriarchal society which lies behind as well as surrounds their narrative voices. The narratives of the female protagonists being "ousted" or "ostracized" and forced to wander are often reserved or tend to be centered on the self-accusation or self-reflection, but these narratives of the discretion uncannily reveals their oppressed and vulnerable position as being fringed to the edge of the society. The narrative discretion seen in Christina Rossetti's poems consequently led to reveal the reality

of oppressed women and should be regarded as the poet's strategy for depicting them as the real figure as possible.

### Notes

- (1) Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "The Aesthetics of Renunciation," Tess Cosslett ed. *Victorian Women Poets*, (London / New York : Longman, 1999) 141.
- (2) Dolores Rosenblum, *Christina Rossetti : The Poetry of Endurance*, (Cambridge and Edwardsville : Southern Illinois University Press, 1986) 7.
- (3) Dolores Rosenblum, 7.
- (4) Dolores Rosenblum, 7.
- (5) Christina Rossetti composed many songs as well as verses and narrative poems in her life time. They are consisted of both secular and religious poems. Several of her earlier poems were published under the pseudonym on *The Germ*, the literary magazine of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.
- (6) R.W. Crump and Betty S. Flowers, eds. *Christina Rossetti : The Complete Poems*. (London : Penguin, 2001) 52. (The citation of the following poems of Christina Rossetti except for the one in *Sing – Song : A Nursery Rhyme Book* is based on this text. The numbers of the end of each citation indicate the lines of each poem.)
- (7) Norman McCord and Bill Purdue, *British History 1815-1914 : The Short Oxford History of the Modern World*. 2007, (Oxford / New York : Oxford University Press, 2009) 362. (The women who have "fallen" have rather been recognized as "victimized". However, the term "fallen woman" or "fallen women" should be used in this paper as the more prevalent term(s) in the studying of Victorian literature.)
- (8) Norman McCord and Bill Purdue, 362.
- (9) Christina Rossetti's taking part in the voluntary works are based on the working of her female family members and it is clear that her applying for the nursing troop of Florence Nightingale when

the Crimean War broke out was inspired by the activity of her aunt, Eliza Polidori. Her applying was turned down because of her age.

- (10) Mary Arseneau, *Recovering Christina Rossetti : Female Community and Incarnational Poetics*. (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 23.
- (11) R.W. Crump and Betty S. Flowers, eds. "Table of Dates." *Christina Rossetti : The Complete Poems*. (London : Penguin, 2001) xlix.
- (12) Liza Picard, *Victorian London : The Tale of a City*. 2005, (New York : St. Martin's Griffin, 2007) 255.
- (13) Dolores Rosenblum, *Christina Rossetti : The Poetry of Endurance*, xiii.
- (14) Dolores Rosenblum, xiii.
- (15) Susan Conley, "Rossetti's Cold Women : Irony and Liminal Fantasy in the Death Lyrics," Mary Arseneau, Antony H. Harrison and Lorrain Janzen Kooistra, eds. *The Culture of Christina Rossetti : Female Poetics and Victorian Contexts*. (Athens / Ohio : Ohio University Press, 1999) 265.
- (16) As is indicated in "Table of Dates" by R.W. Crump and Betty S. Flowers, Christina Rossetti seems to have been still working as a volunteer at St. Mary Magdalen Home when she completed this sonnet. It is highly likely that the sonnet "From Sunset to Star Rise" was written on the basis of the poet's experience in working in the institution.
- (17) Susan Conley, "Rossetti's Cold Women : Irony and Liminal Fantasy in the Death Lyrics," 267.
- (18) Christina G. Rossetti, *Sing Song : A Nursery Rhyme Book*. 1872, Rpt. General Publishing Company Ltd., 1968, 19.
- (19) Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, *Christina Rossetti and Illustration : A Publishing History*. (Athens / Ohio : Ohio University Press, 2002) 108.
- (20) Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, 108.
- (21) John Ruskin, "The Nature of Gothic," ed. Clive Wilmer, *Unto This Last and Other Writings*, 1985, (London, Penguin, rpt, 1997) 97.

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