The Magic of Poetic Language--Stylistic Analysis of Christina Georgina Rossetti's Poem Song

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Abstract: Christina Georgina Rossetti is an important female poet in England in the late 19th Century. Her famous poem Song shows the stylistic features of Christina Georgina Rossetti, but also indicates her complex feeling and degage attitudes towards love and death.

1. Introduction

Christina Georgina Rossetti was born in 1830 in London. When she was young, she developed an early love for art and literature. She is one of the best female poets in the history of English literature. Rossetti's healthy is usually poor. She was considered for the position of Poet Laureate, before her final illness made the appointment impossible. Her poetry is suffused with religious piety. She modeled herself on the Seventeenth Century spiritual poet George Herbert. She was also associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood headed by her brother D.G. Rossetti, and shared the Pre-Raphaelite taste for the beautiful but sad and languid imagery. Her diction is remarkable for its simplicity and sincerity.

Christina Rossetti devoted her lifelong time to religious faith, which also prevent her pursuing freedom and happy marriage. Christina Rossetti once fell in love twice in her life, the first time with James Collinson, then later with Charles Cayley. Infirm corporeity, devout religion belief and the pursuing of impractical ideal love made her live in an unreal world. In her the idea of love turned inexorably to the idea of death, and in this association we can surely see her instinctive shrinking from the surrender which love demands. She is pious and melancholy, fresh and beautiful, just like a lily in cold rain. In her life, her poetry style has experienced a change from fresh and pure to graceful and desolate. Only in her piteous lyrics we can sense her tender heart, emerging emotional riptide and plaintive poetic plot.

As an important female poet in England in the late 19th Century, Christina Rossetti is chiefly celebrated for her short lyrics, several of which are truly gems in the English language, for example, her short poems Song and Remember etc. Common things for example, little animals, flowers or trees usually appear in her poem to express her thought. She also has had her influence upon a number of English and American female poets in the 20th century. Even in China, Christina Rossetti's influence is enormous. Xu Zhimo, one of the famous Chinese poets in 20th century once said that to some extent her poetry affected his writing style greatly. Another famous litterateur, Wu Mi also admitted that he was under the big influence of Christina Rossetti.

2. Major Theme of the Poem

The poem Song is one of the lyrics of Christina Rossetti which afford for thought. The whole poem is filled with kind of sweet sorriness, distinct affection and plain sadness. The author seems to express her subtile satisfaction of finding true love and her helpless mood towards the disappearance of life and love.

It is believed that Christina Rossetti's lover in the Song refers to her first boyfriend, James Collins. In her indecisive love of her early days, the melancholy reflected in her poem reflects the poet's psychological state at that moment. In her poem, the contrast of lines and artistic conception make the protagonist's complex and contradictory mood appear vividly on the paper.

In the wonderful "Song", Christina foresees what death will mean to her and wonders if perhaps she also will forget the past: "I shall not see the shadows, /I shall not feel the rain; /I shall not hear the nightingale." Facing death, none of dread, none of pathos appears in her poem. On the contrary, we can sense her indifference, easiness and pizzazz. She refuses gorgeous roses but loves little grass with hearty vitality. Probably, the narrator wishes to live toughly and muchly in the spiritual world.

Linguistic features of the poem

2.1 Lexical Features

The language of Song is simple and pure.Most of words are everyday words, with the exception of three old styles words for instance, "Thou" in line three, seven and eight, "doth" in line fourteen and "Haply" in line fifteen and sixteen. Since there are no big words, it makes the reader feel that what the narrator says is no exaggeration, but truthful and authentic. The poet chooses some common noun phrase, some familiar things to express her inner heart, for example, roses, cypress tress, grass, shadows, rain and nightingale. This simplicity enables the poem to be popularized among the common people, since it is easy to read and remember. In china, famous deceased poet Xu Zhimo translated the poem to Chinese, and later this poem Song was even singed by singers.

The simplicity of the language of Song does not reduce the artistic value of the poem, nor does it lessen its popularity among the world. On the contrary, Christina Georgina Rossetti takes full advantage of her simplicity of language and makes this poem a masterpiece and enjoys of worldwide fame.

Another merit of the poem lies in the verb choices of the poet. Christina Georgina Rossetti deliberately chooses sensory verbs or simple verbs for example see, feel, hear, sing, plant, remember, forget, rise and set. One of the advantages of doing so is to add to the third dimension of the poem, thus giving readers a kind of authentic feeling and moreover these plain but vivid verbs are easy for memorizing and beautiful for recital.

Using simple and common vocabulary is a typical style of Christina Georgina Rossetti. Through her simplicity we appreciate her magic rein of words and her tender poetic soul.

2.2 Syntactic Features

This poem is actually formed by sixteen-line sentences. It contains two poignant stanzas of haunting rhythm beginning with "When I am dead,my dearest",ending on a note of lingering sadness:"Haply I may remember,/And haply may forget."In every stanza, there are eight sentences.

2.2.1 Parallelism

In the first stanza, the narrator uses parallelism sentence pattern to express that the poet does not need sadness for her and roses and cypress trees to memorize her after death. "Sing no sad songs for

me; /plant thou no roses at my head, / Nor shady cypress tree;" and the last two parallelism sentences of the first stanza also reflect the poet's free and easy attitude toward love and life, "And if thou wilt, remember, /And if thou wilt, forget." This sentence pattern shows symmetry beauty and is easy to remember.

In the second stanza, the author once again uses three parallelism sentence patterns to describe her life after death: "I shall not see the shadows, I shall not feel the rain; I shall not hear the nightingale." This use of parallelism sentence pattern makes the poem good cadence in sound, comeliness in form and also it strengthens the intention of the poet. The last two senesces, "Haply I may remember, /And haply may forget." contrast two conditions of herself. She may remember or forget him or the past. This kind of contradistinguish sharply reflect the narrator's contrary mentality.

2.2.2 Repetition

The artistic value of the poem lies also in its words repetition in the first stanza and second stanza: "And if thou wilt, remember, /And if thou wilt, forget.", "Haply I may remember, /And haply may forget." In the two stanzas, the words "remember" and "forget" are used repeatedly. On the one hand, this repetition highlights the theme of the poem; On the other hand, the repeated use of the two words looks to the first stanza and at the same time, it creates a kind of poetic extension.

2.3 Semantic Features

2.3.1 Imagery

In the poem Song, the poet thinks and expresses herself in images. She presents to the reader his concrete world of things, and recalls the sight and sound and feel of them. With imagery Christina Georgina Rossetti peoples and furnishes the world of her poem. And she depends on her readers' ability to see and hear and feel imaginatively.

The poem Song has only sixteen lines with simple word choice. While the poet uses some vivid authentic noun phrases for example, sad songs, roses, shady cypress tree, green grass, showers, dewdrops, shadows, the rain, nightingale, and twilight. These images give readers a lot of room for imagination.

2.3.2 Symbolism

In fact sometimes it is difficult to distinguish image with symbol. A symbol is the use of one thing (usually concrete) to stand for another (usually abstract). That means we can get profound meaning from simple words or phrases. For example, in the first stanza of Song, "sad songs" stand for sorriness and weeping; "red roses" stand for something that is beautiful but is easy to destroy; "shady cypress tree" stands for beautiful things; and "green grass" stands for adamancy and hearty vitality.

In the second stanza, the poet emphasizes that "I shall not see the shadows. /I shall not feel the rain; /I shall not hear the nightingale." Here, "the shadow", "the rain" and "the nightingale" stand for the beautiful things of the real world. The poet means that the beautiful things of the real world are nothing to her and she wants to be green grass that only needs showers and dewdrops. In the poem, the poet expresses her complex feelings, a little melancholy, a little pizzazz and a little contradiction.

2.3.3 Christina Style

Christina Georgina Rossetti's poem is full of beautiful but sad and languid imagery. She is good at using common things to strengthen the theme of her poem. Her simplicity and pureness enable her poem enjoying comprehensive attention. In some sense her style is similar to the Chinese female poet Li Qingzhao in Song Dynasty. She likes a lily, though near at hand, but reachless always.

Another feature of Rossetti's poem is her eternal religious faith in her poem. Obviously, her piteous lyrics strikes a chord with her readers and establishes a unique position in poetry history of the world. Devout religious belief makes her life clear and simple, but measuring life by the standards of heaven, everything becomes so insignificant, which also led him to shut love out twice. She won't sacrifice his religious beliefs for love.

3. Conclusion

In Christina Georgina's poem, death is the eternal theme. Obviously, the exploring of the death is the soul course of searching the meaning of life, the struggle against the sufferings and the reminders of cherish of happiness of today.

Christina Georgina Rossetti's poem Song really deserves comprehensive study. The careful word choice, attention to language, and lots of meaningful images calls for special reading and thoughtful appreciation. After an analysis of the linguistic features of this poem, we can have a better understanding of the author's idea, appreciate the beauty of every aspect of this poem and feel her religious feelings toward life. She is one of the greatest Victorian poetesses and shines brightly till now.

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