

Unit 5

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

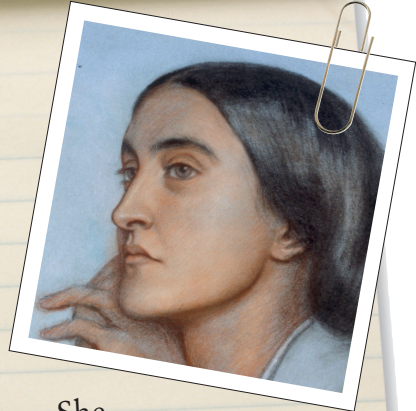
Christina Rossetti

1830-1894

Christina Rossetti was born into an Anglo-Italian family which had strong religious convictions and a great love of the arts.

These two influences are reflected in her life and her writing. She lived quietly, caring for her family, working for charity and writing poems. Twice she planned to marry but, on both occasions, her religious principles led her to call off the engagement.

Christina Rossetti's brother was Dante Gabriel Rossetti, part of a famous group of painters called The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Like the Pre-Raphaelite painters, Rossetti often took nature as her subject and tried to depict it in precise detail, as in the poem *Spring* (page 219). She wrote in a range of different styles and this collection includes sonnets, lyric verse, narrative fable and even a Christmas carol. These poems show an awareness of the role of women, a belief in the afterlife and, perhaps most revealing of all, the idea of preserving a secret space for oneself (*Winter: My Secret* page 223).



The poems

In an Artist's Studio

One face looks out from all his canvases,
 One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans:
 We found her hidden just behind those screens,
That mirror gave back all her loveliness.
A queen in opal or in ruby dress,
 A nameless girl in freshest summer-greens,
 A saint, an angel – every canvas means
The same one meaning, neither more nor less.
He feeds upon her face by day and night,
 And she with true kind eyes looks back on him,
Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:
 Not wan with waiting, not with sorrow dim;
Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright;
 Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.

Up-Hill

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
 Yes, to the very end.
Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
 From morn to night, my friend.

But is there for the night a resting-place?
 A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.
May not the darkness hide it from my face?
 You cannot miss that inn.

Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?
 Those who have gone before.
Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?
 They will not keep you standing at that door.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?
 Of labour you shall find the sum.
Will there be beds for me and all who seek?
 Yea, beds for all who come.

Song

When I am dead, my dearest,
 Sing no sad songs for me;
 Plant thou no roses at my head,
 Nor shady cypress tree:
 Be the green grass above me
 With showers and dewdrops wet;
 And if thou wilt, remember,
 And if thou wilt, forget.

I shall not see the shadows,
 I shall not feel the rain;
 I shall not hear the nightingale
 Sing on, as if in pain;
 And dreaming through the twilight
 That doth not rise nor set,
 Haply I may remember,
 And haply may forget.

Spring

Frost-locked all the winter,
 Seeds, and roots, and stones of fruits,
 What shall make their sap ascend
 That they may put forth shoots?
 Tips of tender green,
 Leaf, or blade or sheath;
 Telling of the hidden life
 That breaks forth underneath,
 Life nursed in its grave by Death.

Blows the thaw-wind pleasantly,
 Drips the soaking rain,
 By fits looks down the waking sun:
 Young grass springs on the plain;
 Young leaves clothe early hedgerow trees;
 Seeds, and roots, and stones of fruits,
 Swollen with sap put forth their shoots;
 Curled-headed ferns sprout in the lane;
 Birds sing and pair again.