

# Christina Rossetti (1830-94)

## A BIRTHDAY (1861)

This poem was published for the first time in the *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1861.

### Text One

1 Read the poem through.

- Underline the sentence that tells you whose birthday the poet is celebrating.
- What makes it a birthday?

My heart is like a singing bird

Whose nest is in a watered shoot<sup>1</sup>;

My heart is like an apple-tree

Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit

5 My heart is like a rainbow<sup>2</sup> shell

That paddles<sup>3</sup> in a halcyon<sup>4</sup> sea;

My heart is gladder than all these

Because my love is come to *me*.

**me refers to...**

Raise me a dais<sup>5</sup> of silk and down<sup>6</sup>;

10 Hang *it* with vair<sup>7</sup> and purple dyes<sup>8</sup>;

Carve<sup>9</sup> it in doves<sup>10</sup> and pomegranates,

And peacocks with a hundred eyes;

Work it in gold and silver grapes,

In leaves and silver fleurs-de-lys<sup>11</sup>;

15 Because the birthday of my life

Is come, my love is come to me.

**it refers to...**

2 Focus on the first stanza.

- What figures of speech are used?
- Group the similes according to the senses they appeal to.
- What colours are evoked?
- What world are the images taken from?
- What feelings are they meant to convey?

3 Focus on the second stanza.

- How does this stanza differ from the first?
- What is the effect of the repeated use of imperatives?
- Which sense/s do the images described appeal to?
- What world are they taken from?
- What link/s can you find between the imagery of the first and the second stanzas?

1. *shoot*, new growth on a plant (germoglio).  
2. *rainbow*, of the colours of the rainbow (iridata).  
3. *paddles*, walks in shallow water (sguazza).  
4. *halcyon*, peaceful and happy (tranquillo).  
5. *dais*, raised platform (palco).  
6. *down*, soft feathers (piume).

7. *vair*, variegated (variegati).  
8. *dyes*, colours (colori).  
9. *Carve*, decorate by cutting (intaglia).  
10. *doves*, kind of birds (colombe).  
11. *fleurs-de-lys*, kind of flower (gigli).