

The House of Life. Sonnet 83. Barren Spring

Once more the changed year's turning wheel returns:
And as a girl sails balanced in the wind,
And now before and now again behind
Stoops as it swoops, with check that laughs and burns,--
So Spring comes merry towards me here, but earns
No answering smile from me, whose life is twin'd
With the dead boughs that winter still must bind,
And whom to-day the Spring no more concerns.

Behold, this crocus is a withering flame;
This snowdrop, snow; this apple-blossom's part
To breed the fruit that breeds the serpent's art.
Nay, for these Spring-flowers, turn thy face from them,
Nor stay till on the year's last lily-stem
The white cup shrivels round the golden heart.

Analysis

The sonnets of ***The House of Life*** were written during a period of thirty years 1848-1881. Although they do not form an organic whole, they fulfill the mission indicated in the introductory sonnet. The title came from Rossetti's interest in astrology, astrologists believed that heavens were divided into "houses", the most important of which was the house of human life. The sonnets were largely autobiographical. They were inspired by Rossetti's love for his wife Elizabeth Siddal and sometimes simply by the idea of woman.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was a group of young painters (D.G. Rossetti, John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt, F.G. Stephens, James Collinson and Thomas Woolner) who had drawn up a scheme for revolutionarizing the pictorial arts in 1848. They rejected the norms of painting current since the late Renaissance in favor of what they insisted was the superior directness of expression of those artists who worked before the time of Raphael. The group had a short-lived journal, The Gem, an experimental mixture of poetry, prose and essay. Rossetti's poetry is essentially decorative and descriptive. In some of his landscape poems like "The Wood spurge" he can suggest momentary

experience and an intensity of vision. The majority of his verses deal with his fascination with the female face and the female body.

Sonnet No.83 Barren Spring

The title of the poem is contradictory, spring is the season of fertility but according to the poet spring is barren. In the opening lines of the poem the poet made use of simile when he compares spring to a young girl. The girl's cheeks are glittering and she is joyfully jumping in the air, sometimes the wind pushes her forward, other times the wind pushes her backward and she tries to keep herself balanced in the air. The poet points out that spring is the season of youth and fertility so when it comes it brings with it happiness to all people except him, he says that spring invited him to enjoy life but he did not smile to spring because he feels sad and unable to enjoy life. Spring which is supposed to be full of life and energy was totally different to the poet who was sad. He cannot enjoy it because winter is in his heart.

Lines 6-8

The poet connects himself with winter, he compares himself to the dry boughs of winter which can be easily broken. Winter is in his heart and the snow covers his life.

Line 9

The poet is commenting on the transitory aspect of life by taking examples from nature, the crocus is going to wither after a short period of time. Then he describes the snowdrops which symbolize lack of life or energy.

Lines 10-12

The poet describes the apple tree which carries many apples but these apples will feed the serpents, this is another image which emphasizes the transitory aspect of life. The poet is not enjoying the natural scene in front of him and he turns his face from the flowers which are blooming because he knows that they are going to wither within a short period of time. The poet is hopeless, he says that he is not going to live long to see the lily shrivels round its golden heart. He used the image of the white cup to symbolize death. He is thinking of death as the ultimate end of all the living creatures