

D.G.Rossetti : The Blessed Damozel

Dante Gabriel Rossetti
poet, painter and translator.

Born : 1828,
Died : 1882
Periods : Romanticism, Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood

- He was the brother of poet Christina Rossetti, critic William Michael Rossetti, and author Maria Francesca Rossetti.
- Dante Gabriel Rossetti was the main inspiration for a second generation of artists and writers influenced by the movement for the writers William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones.
- His paintings became a major influence on the development of the European Symbolist movement.
- He is described as "self-possessed, articulate, passionate and charismatic" "ardent, poetic and feckless".
- He was the major precursor of the Aesthetic movement.
- His early poetry was influenced by John Keats.
- He wrote sonnets to accompany his pictures, spanning from *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and *Astarte Syriaca*
- He created art to illustrate poem "Goblin Market" by his sister Christina Rossetti.

Founded : the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848

- Other members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood: William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais.
- Their aim was to communicate a message of "moral reform" through the style of their works, exhibiting a "truth to nature".
- The brotherhood's magazine, *The Germ*, published in 1850.
- Rossetti contributed a poem, "The Blessed Damozel".

John Ruskin wrote:

Every Pre-Raphaelite landscape background is painted to the last touch, in the open air, from the thing itself. Every Pre-Raphaelite figure studied in expression, is a true portrait of some living person.

- Rossetti translated Italian poetry Dante Alighieri's *La Vita Nuova* and published as *The Early Italian Poets* in 1861.
- Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* inspired his art.
- The Oxford movement, also known as the Tractarian Movement had begun a push toward the restoration of Christian traditions. Rev. William Dodsworth was responsible for the Catholic practice of placing flowers and candles by the altar.
- The Anglo-Catholic revival very much affected Rossetti in the late 1840s and early 1850s.

- His "Hand and Soul," written in 1849, displays his main character Chiaro as an artist with spiritual inclinations. In the text, Chiaro's spirit appears before him in the form of a woman who instructs him to "set thine hand and thy soul to serve man with God."
- His "Ave" written in 1847, displays Mary awaits the day that she will meet her son in Heaven, uniting the earthly with the heavenly. It highlights a strong element in Anglican Marian theology that describes Mary's body and soul having been assumed into Heaven.
- He published *Ballads and Sonnets*, containing 'Rose Mary' 'The White Ship', 'The King's Tragedy' and the completed sonnet sequence, 'The House of Life' and reissued with changes, the *Poems* of 1870.

The Blessed Damozel

Author	:	Dante Gabriel Rossetti
Genre	:	a dramatic lyric poem
Completed	:	1847
Published	:	1850
Published in	:	<i>The Germ</i> , a journal of the pre-Raphaelite movement in painting and literature.
Revised and republished	:	1856 in <i>The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine</i> and in 1870 in <i>Poems by D.G. Rossetti</i>
Source	:	Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven," about a man who mourns the death of his beloved Lenore.
Theme	:	Undying Love

POEM

The blessed damozel lean'd out
 From the gold bar of Heaven;
 Her eyes were deeper than the depth
 Of waters still'd at even;
 She had three lilies in her hand,
 And the stars in her hair were seven.

Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem,
 No wrought flowers did adorn,
 But a white rose of Mary's gift,
 For service meetly worn;

Her hair that lay along her back
Was yellow like ripe corn.

Herseem'd she scarce had been a day
One of God's choristers;
The wonder was not yet quite gone
From that still look of hers;
Albeit, to them she left, her day
Had counted as ten years.

(To one, it is ten years of years.
...Yet now, and in this place,
Surely she lean'd o'er me—her hair
Fell all about my face....
Nothing: the autumn-fall of leaves.
The whole year sets apace.)

It was the rampart of God's house
That she was standing on:
By God built over the sheer depth
The which is Space begun;
So high, that looking downward thence
She scarce could see the sun.

It lies in Heaven, across the flood
Of ether, as a bridge.
Beneath, the tides of day and night
With flame and darkness ridge
The void, as low as where this earth
Spins like a fretful midge.

Around her, lovers, newly met
'Mid deathless love's acclaims,
Spoke evermore among themselves
Their heart-remember'd names;
And the souls mounting up to God
Went by her like thin flames.

And still she bow'd herself and stoop'd
Out of the circling charm;
Until her bosom must have made
The bar she lean'd on warm,
And the lilies lay as if asleep
Along her bended arm.

From the fix'd place of Heaven she saw

Time like a pulse shake fierce
Through all the worlds. Her gaze still strove
Within the gulf to pierce
Its path; and now she spoke as when
The stars sang in their spheres.

The sun was gone now; the curl'd moon
Was like a little feather
Fluttering far down the gulf; and now
She spoke through the still weather.
Her voice was like the voice the stars
Had when they sang together.

(Ah sweet! Even now, in that bird's song,
Strove not her accents there,
Fain to be hearken'd? When those bells
Possess'd the mid-day air,
Strove not her steps to reach my side
Down all the echoing stair?)

"I wish that he were come to me,
For he will come," she said.
"Have I not pray'd in Heaven?—on earth,
Lord, Lord, has he not pray'd?
Are not two prayers a perfect strength?
And shall I feel afraid?"

"When round his head the aureole clings,
And he is cloth'd in white,
I'll take his hand and go with him
To the deep wells of light;
As unto a stream we will step down,
And bathe there in God's sight.

"We two will lie i' the shadow of
Occult, withheld, untrod,
Whose lamps are stirr'd continually
With prayer sent up to God;
And see our old prayers, granted, melt
Each like a little cloud.

"We two will lie i' the shadow of
That living mystic tree
Within whose secret growth the Dove
Is sometimes felt to be,
While every leaf that His plumes touch

Saith His Name audibly.

"And I myself will teach to him,
I myself, lying so,
The songs I sing here; which his voice
Shall pause in, hush'd and slow,
And find some knowledge at each pause,
Or some new thing to know."

(Alas! we two, we two, thou say'st!
Yea, one wast thou with me
That once of old. But shall God lift
To endless unity
The soul whose likeness with thy soul
Was but its love for thee?)

"We two," she said, "will seek the groves
Where the lady Mary is,
With her five handmaidens, whose names
Are five sweet symphonies,
Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen,
Margaret and Rosalys.

"Circlewise sit they, with bound locks
And foreheads garlanded;
Into the fine cloth white like flame
Weaving the golden thread.
To fashion the birth-ropes for them
Who are just born, being dead.

"He shall fear, haply, and be dumb:
Then will I lay my cheek
To his, and tell about our love,
Not once abash'd or weak:
And the dear Mother will approve
My pride, and let me speak.

"Herself shall bring us, hand in hand,
To Him round whom all souls
Kneel, the clear-ranged unnumber'd heads
Bow'd with their aureoles:
And angels meeting us shall sing
To their citherns and citoles.

"There will I ask of Christ the Lord
Thus much for him and me:—

Only to live as once on earth
With Love,—only to be,
As then awhile, forever now
Together, I and he."

She gazed and listen'd and then said,
Less sad of speech than mild,—
"All this is when he comes." She ceas'd.
The light thrill'd towards her, fill'd
With angels in strong level flight.
Her eyes pray'd, and she smil'd

(I saw her smile.) But soon their path
Was vague in distant spheres:
And then she cast her arms along
The golden barriers,
And laid her face between her hands,
And wept. (I heard her tears.)

The blessed damozel is a maiden. She had attained Heaven after death. She stood leaning out from the gold bar of Heaven. Her eyes were deep and tranquil deeper than the bottom of still waters in the evening. In her hand there were three lilies attesting to her purity and the nearness of the triune God and in her hair there were seven stars symbolizing the Pleiades, the seven daughters of Atlas and Pleione in Greek mythology. These seven young women are Alcyone, Celaeno, Electra, Maia, Merope, Sterope, and Taygete. They attended the goddess of virginity, Artemis. They became stars in the heavens after they died. The robe she wore was loose at one end, and it was plain with no flowers to adorn it, but affixed to it is a single white rose, a gift of the Blessed Virgin Mary in recognition of the damozel's faithful service to Heaven.

The blessed damozel had taken up her new duties in Heaven as one of God's choristers for scarcely a day. She is new this surrounding; and there was still a look of wonder in her eyes. It seems to her that she has abided in the celestial realm no more than a day. But the family and friends she left behind miss her in the Earth feels as if ten years have passed since they last saw her.

Her lover is standing at the same spot in the earth. He won't to meet his love. He lost himself in a reverie and felt that his beloved still leaned over him so that her hair fell all over his face. But on waking up from the reverie he found that it was not her hair that fell over his face but the falling leaves of autumn.

The blessed damozel stood in the rampart of God's house. This rampart lies between as a bridge space and the inner regions of heaven. It has been built over "the sheer depth". The tides of day and night ebb and flow below the rampart, lapping at the boundaries of the universe and at the earth, which is spinning like a nervous insect. The

blessed damozel sees some of her new friends disporting themselves in loving games and calling each other by their chaste names. The damozel could also see the souls ascending from earth like "thin flames" to God. The damozel still continued to bow down and lean on the golden bar so that the bar must have received the warmth of her bosom. She caught sight of time, which vibrated through the entire world like a pulse. The crescent moon was slowly fluttering in the gulf of space like a little feather. The weather was still, and the damozel spoke in the voice of the stars had when they sang together in chorus a praise of God.

At this moment the lover on earth heard the voice of his beloved in the song of a bird. He even imagined that he heard her steps coming down from Heaven in the sound of midday bells rang in churches.

The blessed damozel wished that her lover would come to her. She felt sure that he would come, for they had been both praying for their reunion, and two prayers were "a perfect strength".

The damozel said that when her lover was raised to Heaven and an aureole surrounded his head as mark of his beatification, she would take him by the hand and lead him to the deep wells of light and bathe in them in God's sight.

She would take him to the mysterious shrine whose lamps are stirred by prayers offered to God.

Then they would see how the lamps, lit up by their prayers would melt into clouds since their prayers would have been answered by that time.

She would also take her lover to the shadow of that mystic tree in which the Dove sometimes resides, inspiring each leaf to utter the name of God.

She would then teach her lover the songs she had learnt in Heaven.

The lover who had been listening to the words of his beloved so far was here struck with her repeated saying "we two, we two". He remembered the time when they were both one. She was his only affinity with her, would be a sufficient force to reunite him to her.

The blessed damozel was harassed by no such doubts in Heaven. She went on to say that she and her lover would go to the groves where Lady Mary would be found with her five hand-maidens. The blessed damozel proposes to take her lover to the groves where Virgin Mary and her five hand-maidens, Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen, Margaret and Rosaly, can be seen. These maidens are sweet-natured like symphonies. These hand-maidens sat circle-wise weaving birth robes for those who had just come to Heaven. The damozel would make her lover feel at home by laying her cheek against his and talking to him about her love. Mother Mary would then lead them both to the

presence of Christ. The damozel would beg Christ to allow her to live for ever in love with her lover.

The blessed damozel ceased. The light thrilled towards her, full of angels. The damozel stood smiling engaged in prayer. Then the lover on earth saw her throwing her arms along the bars' and weeping. He heard her tears.

- "The Blessed Damozel", was an imitation of Keats, and he believed Hunt might share his artistic and literary ideals.
- It is a story about a fictional early Italian artist inspired by a vision of a woman who bids him combine the human and the divine in his art.
- "The Blessed Damozel," written between 1847 and 1870, Rossetti uses biblical language such as "From the gold bar of Heaven" to describe the Damozel looking down to Earth from Heaven.
- A common theme in Rossetti's works is a connection between body and soul, mortal and supernatural, Alexa Wilding was a model *Veronica Veronese*, *The Blessed Damozel*, *A Sea-Spell*, and other paintings.
- They were attacked as the epitome of the "fleshly school of poetry".
- Rossetti's poem "The Blessed Damozel" was the inspiration for Claude Debussy's cantata *La Damoiselle élue*.
- Rossetti told his biographer, T. Hall Caine, that he wrote "The Blessed Damozel" as a sequel to "The Raven, I saw that Poe had done the utmost that it was possible to do with the grief of a lover on earth, and so I determined to reverse the conditions, and give utterance to the yearning of the loved one in heaven."
- Leigh Hunt found an obvious source of inspiration in Dante and admired the 'Dantesque' Heaven of the poem.
- Rossetti said that the poem was written in the Gothic manner.