

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82)

1 *The Blessed Damozel*

The blessed damozel leaned out  
From the gold bar of Heaven;  
Her eyes were deeper than the depth  
Of waters stilled at even;  
She had three lilies in her hand, 5  
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; 10  
Her hair that lay along her back  
Was yellow like ripe corn.

Herseemed she scarce had been a day  
One of God's choristers;  
The wonder was not yet quite gone 15  
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, 20  
Surely she leaned 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 25  
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. 30

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 35  
Spins like a fretful midge.

Around her, lovers, newly met  
'Mid deathless love's acclaims,  
Spoke evermore among themselves  
Their heart-remembered names; 40  
And the souls mounting up to God  
Went by her like thin flames.

And still she bowed herself and stooped  
Out of the circling charm;  
Until her bosom must have made 45  
The bar she leaned on warm,  
And the lilies lay as if asleep  
Along her bended arm.

From the fixed place of Heaven she saw  
Time like a pulse shake fierce 50  
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 curled moon 55  
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. 60

(Ah sweet! Even now, in that bird's song,  
Strove not her accents there,  
Fain to be hearkened? When those bells  
Possessed the mid-day air,  
Strove not her steps to reach my side 65  
Down all the echoing stair?)

"I wish that he were come to me,  
For he will come," she said.  
"Have I not prayed in Heaven?—on earth,  
Lord, Lord, has he not pray'd? 70  
Are not two prayers a perfect strength?  
And shall I feel afraid?"

"When round his head the aureole clings,  
And he is clothed in white,  
I'll take his hand and go with him 75  
To the deep wells of light;  
As unto a stream we will step down,  
And bathe there in God's sight.

"We two will stand beside that shrine,  
Occult, withheld, untrod, 80  
Whose lamps are stirred 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 85  
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. 90

“And I myself will teach to him,  
I myself, lying so,  
The songs I sing here; which his voice  
Shall pause in, hushed and slow,  
And find some knowledge at each pause, 95  
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 100  
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 105  
Are five sweet symphonies,  
Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen,  
Margaret and Rosalys.

“Circlewise sit they, with bound locks  
And foreheads garlanded; 110  
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 115  
Then will I lay my cheek  
To his, and tell about our love,  
Not once abashed or weak:  
And the dear Mother will approve  
My pride, and let me speak. 120

“Herself shall bring us, hand in hand,  
To Him round whom all souls

